

# THE MUSEUM OF MODERN ART

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## NEW KINDS OF PLAYGROUND EQUIPMENT ON VIEW AT MUSEUM OF MODERN ART

Prize winning designs from a national competition for play sculpture for children will be on view at the Museum of Modern Art, 11 West 53 Street, from June 30 through August 22 in an exhibition aimed at stimulating a new approach to the design of equipment in public playgrounds. The nation-wide competition, which drew 360 entries, was sponsored by Parents' Magazine, the Museum of Modern Art and Creative Playthings, Inc.

A Fantastic Village, a Stalagmite Cave and a Tunnel Maze, the three top winning designs, will be shown in full-size actual examples manufactured by Creative Playthings, Inc. Sculptural forms for a sandbox, a multi-tunnel system and movable playground equipment consisting of square frames and swinging panels, which were awarded honorable mentions, will be shown in scale models. In addition, a playhouse, a double climbing wall, an asymmetrical jungle gym and a "ferrophone" designed to replace conventional wire fencing, all of which received citations, will also be shown in scale models. Photographs of some of the most unusual and interesting additional entries will be on view also.

The purpose of the competition was to encourage the design of new kinds of playground equipment which, by its shape and use of colors, would stimulate children's imagination as well as meet the standard requirements of physical exercise, safety and ease of adult supervision.

Parents' Magazine will carry an illustrated story on the competition results in its July issue, and Creative Playthings, Inc., has produced the three top winners for the market. Greta Daniel, Assistant Curator at the Museum, was Competition Director.

All the winners, who were awarded their prizes at a ceremony at the Museum on Tuesday, June 29, are young artists and designers. Virginia Dortch Dorazio, who won \$1000 for her design of a Fantastic Village, is a 28-year-old painter from Arkansas who now lives in Rome with her Italian architect-painter husband. The second prize of \$500 was won by Robert J. Gargiule of Raritan, New Jersey, a 33-year-old industrial designer, for a Stalagmite Cave and the third prize of \$200 by Sidney Gordin, a 36-year-old New York sculptor for the Tunnel Maze. The three honorable mentions, each carrying a cash award of \$100, were also won by young designers. Dean Latourell, who submitted abstract sculptural forms for a sandbox, is only 19 years old, and is a student at the School of Architecture, University of Washington. A 26-year-old painter, Julia Pearl, born in Brooklyn, and now a design instructor at the Minneapolis

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School of Art, received honorable mention for the multi-tunnel system, and Joseph A. Maxwell, Jr., a 21-year-old student at the Alabama Polytechnical Institute, won an honorable mention for a design using modular frames and panels.

In addition, citations not provided for in the original competition program, were awarded to Tse Yun Chu, a 23-year-old designer who was born in Tientsin, China, and now lives in New York, for a playhouse design, to W. J. McLarty, a 35-year-old painter who teaches at the Portland Art Museum School, for a double climbing wall, to Harvey Weiss, a 32-year-old painter and designer from New York for a jungle gym and to Harold Krisel and Martin Rosenzweig, New York painters and designers, for a "ferrophone" fence.

The Fantastic Village, first prize winner, as shown in the exhibition, is composed of four concrete playhouses, each five feet high, with open trellis roofs formed by grids of metal rods. They are grouped together in a sanded area against a sky blue background to create a city square. The walls consist of standardized panels pierced by a variety of openings that serve as doors, windows or climb-throughs. A set of small models next to the Village shows the astonishing variety that can be created by changing these standard wall panels of white, black and terra cotta concrete. The houses are also fitted with climbing pegs, ladders, ropes and sliding poles. This manufactured version is a modification of the original winning design which can be seen in a scale model in the exhibition.

"The judges liked the poetic conception of the design," Miss Daniel said, "and the excellent shape and variations of the wall openings as well as their placement as doors, windows, climb-throughs and punctuating light slits. Their tense lines give the impression of taut skin splitting open, creating a sense of the fantastic. This impression is heightened by the irregular colored light patterns inside the huts and particularly by the way in which the outside colors are applied in strips or by being wrapped around corner. The addition of climbing pegs, ladders, ropes and sliding poles complete the usefulness of the houses while the city square arrangement extends the play area into the outdoors. The five foot height makes the houses adaptable to various age groups."

For the exhibition only the basic unit of the Stalagmite Cave has been produced. The scale model, however, which shows several units arranged together, is also on view. The basic unit is a spool shaped slender column which curves smoothly into a flat-topped, wide-brim capital and identical base. By omitting some bases and some capitals and altering the heights of columns in the group, a stalagmite cave is formed. Flat triangular pieces placed between the bases of the columns make a

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continuous floor from which an abstract landscape of trees, flat-top rocks and jumping stones rises. A playground group of this kind may contain any number of these shapes, produced either in natural cement color or with some colored units as indicated in the artist's color sketch.

"In selecting this design, the judges were impressed by the abstract beauty and architectural quality of its shapes which children may associate with many real life forms," Miss Daniel said. "Like all the other winning designs it is extremely simple, easy to produce and offers play possibilities for various age groups."

The basic unit of the third prize winning design, a tunnel maze, is a low curved bridge. The rising slopes of the bridge contrast sharply with the precisely rounded tunnel underneath. Five manufactured units are arranged in the exhibition in a staggered pattern creating a hilly field for running, jumping, sliding and crawling and a series of tunnels underneath for races or individual shelter nooks. Small movable toys, such as wagons or cars, may be rolled down the outside slopes by younger children or driven through the tunnels where alternating patches of light and shade make interesting patterns. Older children may play ball games over or around the bridges or use them for group singing or story telling. The coloring pigment in the full scale fabricated bridges is the same as that used in the first prize winner, Fantastic Village. The judges considered this design the most successful among the prize winners in regard to play value, safety and ease of supervision.

#### Honorable Mentions

The scale model of sculptured forms for a sandbox was selected from a large group of sculptural forms entered in the competition. In the winning design two large sculptural shapes face each other, resembling the jagged edged parts of a broken egg shell. Tunnels and scooped out hollows pierce the forms to make a shelter, overhangs and caves. In making the award the judges commented on the versatility of the design which permits quiet individual sandbox games as well as group activities.

The design for a tunnel system also shown in a scale model is an abstract sculpture consisting of a cluster of connecting tunnels running in several directions. "The visual attraction of the design," Miss Daniel points out, "rests largely on the dynamic irregularity with which its well-formed parts are fused into an intricate system of channels, pierced by unexpected openings for climbing or peeking." Some of the larger openings are accented by bright color rings.

A play sculpture using modular frames and panels was commended by the judges for the variety of panel designs and for the concept of the simple basic unit which is a square tubular metal frame placed in holes in the ground. Different kinds of

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panels are inserted in the frame, including metal, wire-mesh and panels with cut-outs, climb-throughs or ladders. Combinations of these light-weight, movable frames may be arranged as houses or tents or in rows as climbing walls, hurdles or goals in playing fields.

#### Citations

An intricate playhouse consisting of a rambling metal pipe structure with a series of flat roofs at different levels, ladders and movable colored panels which form walls and doors is one of the four scale models which received citations not originally provided for in the competition rules. Another is a double climbing wall, consisting of two parallel lattice walls, connected by short dowels. Attached to this structure are large flat abstract shapes, geometric and free-form, which are perforated by round or square holes.

Another design which also received a citation is an asymmetrical jungle gym of brass pipe welded together in an intricate pattern and accentuated by bright colored flat panels and decorative brass clusters. This was selected by the judges because it represents a fresh approach to a traditional piece of playground equipment.

A model for a "ferrophone" fence to replace the conventional wire fencing around playgrounds is also on view. The "ferrophone" is composed of a set of graduated brass or steel pipes which sound as the child strikes them while running or walking by. The addition of sound producing elements to general playground equipment and the double use of these pipes as fences won a citation for this design.

The jury consisted of Frank Caplan, Director of Creative Playthings, Inc; Philip C. Johnson, Director of the Museum's Department of Architecture and Design; Victor D'Amico, Director of the Museum's Department of Education; Edith Mitchell, Delaware State Director of Art; Mrs. Penelope Pinson, of Parents' Magazine; and Mr. George D. Butler, Director of the Department of Research at the National Recreation Association. Miss Greta Daniel, Assistant Curator of the Museum's Department of Architecture and Design and Competition Director, served as chairman.

Photographs of the scale models and of the full-size examples are available upon request.