

# THE MUSEUM OF MODERN ART

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No. 6

## BACKGROUND INFORMATION ON THE DEPARTMENT OF ARCHITECTURE AND DESIGN

The Museum of Modern Art established a Department of Architecture and held its first architecture exhibition in 1932, less than three years after the educational institution was founded. "International Exhibition of Modern Architecture" showed the American public for the first time the extraordinary revolution that had occurred in architecture. This was followed by two other pioneering shows: "Objects 1900 and Today" in 1933, and, in 1934, "Machine Art," the latter exhibition stressing the inherent beauty and precision of machine-made objects. These exhibitions inaugurated a program of exhibitions, publications, and related activities in the field of architecture and design, unmatched by any other institution in the country. Today the Department of Architecture and Design deals with a) architecture, b) design of household furnishings, industrial products (both machine-made and handcraft), and c) graphic design, including book jackets, advertising layout, posters, record album covers, package design, etc. Exhibitions of material in these fields are presented regularly at the Museum; books, pamphlets and teaching aids are published; a photographic reference file is maintained and design objects, architectural models, drawings and examples of graphic design are acquired for the Museum Collection. From time to time the Department organizes symposia, lectures or discussion groups to supplement these activities.

### ARCHITECTURE

Architectural exhibitions at the Museum usually consist of scale models, enlarged photographs, three-dimensional color pictures shown in individual stereo viewers, and plans and drawings. Full-scale sections of buildings were constructed in the Museum galleries in the winter of 1957 to show the public the use of materials--steel and glass, bronze, glazed brick, etc.--and the Museum has constructed and furnished three exhibition houses in an outdoor exhibition area.

Some exhibitions survey a particular period and select the most significant buildings for display. "Built in U.S.A.: Post-War Architecture," for example, included private houses built between 1946 and 1953. Some exhibitions present many examples of the work of a single outstanding architect, such as "Mies van der Rohe" or "Frank Lloyd Wright." Architecture in particular areas, such as Latin America and Italy, has been shown, while such related problems as wartime housing and city planning have been the subject of other exhibitions. Many exhibitions have been historical surveys: "Early Modern Architecture--Chicago 1870-1910;" "Henry Hobson Richardson, 1838-1886;" and "Louis Sullivan 1856-1924." Other exhibitions have included models of

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buildings not yet constructed.

### DESIGN

In the field of design, the Museum has exhibited objects ranging from a ball bearing to Lobmeyr glass, typewriters and forks, Tiffany jewel boxes and chemical beakers, fabric used in the inside of tires and unique hand-woven screens. Since 1938, exhibitions of Useful Objects have been frequently presented around Christmas-time. A catalog listing the price and retail source of the objects shown is published so that the public can purchase these Museum-exhibited objects for their own homes. For five years in conjunction with the Merchandise Mart in Chicago, a Museum-appointed jury selected approximately 200 household objects, including chairs, tables, upholstery fabric, kitchen utensils, etc., which they considered the best that had come on the market in the preceding six months. These were exhibited at the semi-annual home furnishings market held in Chicago for furniture buyers from all over the country and also shown at the Museum for the general public.

The Department of Architecture and Design also sponsors competitions and has arranged the production of prize-winning designs in lamps, furniture, textiles and playground equipment with various manufacturers. The "Organic Design in Home Furnishings" competition and exhibition, held in 1941, for example, introduced to the American market revolutionary new furniture by such famous designers as Charles Eames and Eero Saarinen.

### GRAPHIC DESIGN

Typography and graphic design is also a concern of this department. Advertising circulars, book jackets, record album covers, even street signs have been exhibited at the Museum. The work of particular artists, such as the Italian Bruno Munari or the late American Alvin Lustig, as well as the graphic design achievements of a particular company such as Olivetti, have been shown.

In the field of Poster design competitions have been sponsored by the Museum in cooperation with such agencies as the Polio Foundation and National Defense agencies. The Museum has commissioned posters for the Family Service Association and has shown posters from particular countries, from private collections, and a group designed for a particular firm.

The Department of Architecture and Design sponsors symposia on various aspects of its field. One of the most noteworthy was on Automobile design. Many major exhibitions are accompanied by publications that either document the show completely, such as Mies van der Rohe by Philip C. Johnson or Built in U.S.A.: Post-War Architecture, edited by Henry-Russell Hitchcock and Arthur Drexler, or expand its field, such as The Architecture of Japan, by Arthur Drexler, published while the Japanese

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Exhibition House was on view.

#### COLLECTION

The Museum Collection of design objects is unique. Historically, the collection begins with examples of new techniques developed in the late 19th century by Thonet, who made the famous Vienna cafe chair of bent wood. It includes examples of Tiffany glass and furniture by Guimard from the Art Nouveau period, Rietveld furniture from the Stijl movement, chairs, a chess set and fabrics by Bauhaus designers, and a large collection of examples of machine art, ranging from saucepans and plastic kitchenware to typewriters. In furniture the Collection includes chairs and tables from Denmark, Sweden, Finland and the United States; tableware from Germany and England; crafts from Finland, Italy, Denmark, Austria and Czechoslovakia. In the field of architecture, of course, the Museum cannot collect buildings, but it has an extensive photographic reference file, supplemented in a few instances by scale models, including Kiesler's Endless House and Fuller's model for a Geodesic Dome, three dimensional color slides and a group of drawings by architects. The graphic design collection includes more than 1200 posters from the late 19th century to the present, as well as letterheads, advertising circulars, etc.

Arthur Drexler was appointed Director of the Department of Architecture and Design in 1956, after serving as Curator for five years. Among the exhibitions which he has organized are the Japanese House in the Museum garden, an authentic re-creation of a 16th-17th century house, "Ten Automobiles", and "Japanese Calligraphy." He was co-author with Henry-Russell Hitchcock of Built in U.S.A.: Post-War Architecture and installed the exhibition of that title in the Museum. Mr. Drexler installed the exhibition "Latin American Architecture Since 1945," and directed the architectural section of "50 Years of American Art" which toured Europe under the Museum's International Exhibition Program. Among the most recent architectural exhibitions he has directed are "Buildings for Business and Government: New Patrons for Modern Architecture" and "Architecture Worth Saving." Born and educated in New York City, Mr. Drexler was associated with the office of George Nelson, and was architectural editor of Interiors Magazine, before coming to the Museum in 1951. He has lectured at the Pratt Institute, New York University and Yale University.

Greta Daniel is Associate Curator of Design. Born in Germany, she studied history of art at the University of Munich and before coming to this country worked for four years with the Museum Folkwang in Essen. She has been with the Museum of

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Modern Art since 1946. Among the exhibitions she has organized are the "Lamp Competition," the "Playground Sculpture Competition" and "Textiles USA." In collaboration with Mr. Drexler, she organized the first large exhibition at the Museum of the Museum's Design Collection. She also assembled the objects for an exhibition entitled "Design Today in America and Europe" which will be shown in twelve cities in India. Miss Dandel is the author of Useful Objects Today, one of the Museum's teaching portfolio publications. Her primary responsibility is assembling objects for submission to the Museum Collections Committee.

Mildred Constantine is Associate Curator of Graphic Design. She has organized numerous poster exhibitions and shows covering such other aspects of graphic design as "Signs in the Street," "Two Graphic Designers: Alvin Lustig and Bruno Munari" and "Olivetti: Design in Industry". A major forthcoming exhibition scheduled for the autumn of 1959 deals with International Package Design. Miss Constantine has the primary responsibility of assembling examples of graphic design for submission to the Collections Committee. A native New Yorker, Miss Constantine studied at the University of Mexico and the University of Puerto Rico. She formerly worked in the archive of Hispanic Culture of the US Library of Congress, in the office of the federal government's Coordinator of Inter-American Affairs and for the College Art Association. She joined the staff of the Museum in 1949.

Wilder Green, the assistant Director, is a graduate of the Yale Architectural School where he has also taught. He was born in Paris, educated in this country and before joining the Museum in 1957, he worked for several architectural firms.

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