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The present Issue deals with problems of the city centre, approaching the subject from two different directions: In the first part we present a series of downtown shops, some being new buildings inserted in the midst of medieval houses, others being embodied within the structures of old houses. In the second part we present an article on the Rapid Transit project in the San Francisco Bay area, an urban renewal project affecting the downtown centers of that entire region, a scheme that is of world-wide significance.

Renovation at Neumarkt 17 in Zurich

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1964. Architect: Fritz Schwarz BSA/SIA, Zurich

The house at Neumarkt 17 dates from the early Middle Ages. On the upper floors the elevation of 1563 is preserved. On the ground floor there has been installed a display window arrangement which makes it possible to look down into the basement level as well. The new parts of the renovation have neither been adapted to the old designs nor been made to contrast with them, but what has been sought here is an intensive intermingling and fusion of old and new. The possibilities realized here could have a stimulating effect on the entire Old Town.

Studio Sales Room for Gold and Jewellery, Neumarkt 19 in Zurich

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1965. Architect: Wolfgang Behles, Zurich

The space available, measuring 3 m in width and 7 m in depth, is entirely capable of accommodating all the installations: front area with counter of solid wood, work table seating three, behind the curving wall the polishing machine, the safe and the office, at the rear, a small laboratory facility for the chemical processes.

Finnart in Zurich

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1965. Architect: Karl Fleig, Zurich

The renovation of this small house in the Old Town was effected with very simple means. The rooms themselves could not be given too pronounced an emphasis, as such would detract from the articles there displayed for sale. The sole spatial modification was the lowering of a part of the basement ceiling in order to accent spatially a definite tract. This small shop is intended to serve as a sales outlet for furniture and appliances by Alvar Aalto as well as for certain other Finnish products.

Scala House in Basel

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Architects: Johannes Gass & Wilfried Boos BSA/SIA, Basel

The curving intersection of Bäumleingasse and Freie Strasse is an important focal point of the downtown area of Basel. On the site of a number of narrow old buildings this office building was erected; its elevation articulation – at the request of the historical monuments authorities – is designed to recall the old house divisions. On the ground floor there are shops and a snack bar, on the first floor the foyer, and the entire upper part of the house is occupied by a cinema.

Weinburg Office Building in St. Gall

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1961/62. Architects' Group: Heinrich Graf & Werner Baltzer †, St. Gall

The architects were given the assignment of planning an office building with the necessary facilities to accommodate the owner's antique shop. The new construction constitutes the end of a lengthy group of buildings, and it calls for meticulous dimensioning, owing to its exposed situation at a triangular convergence of streets. The shop area could be enlarged by causing the ground floor to project, while the recessed upper floor admits more air and light to the triangular site. The antique shop is in the basement, ground floor and mezzanine floor. Much of the ground-floor surface and the first floor are let as shops. Offices are housed on the second and third floors, and on the fifth floor there are one-room flats with gallery.

The San Francisco Bay Area Rapid Transit System

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by Ueli Roth

The San Francisco Bay Area Rapid Transit System (BARTD) is probably the largest and the most thoroughly prepared rail transport system to be planned since the end of the railway age. It is also the most daring public transport system to challenge the supremacy of the private motor-car. Over and above this, it is noteworthy that such a scheme was decided on by local governmental bodies, which enjoy just as many democratic rights as communes in Switzerland, for example, and in which practically every family owns a car. What is involved here is a community attempt to rescue a city from the threat of dissolution – launched by those who stand to suffer directly from this threat. The fact that BARTD is a venture and is not certain to be a success, along with the fact that the procedure in question is questioned by many technical experts, has been pointed out in WERK, February Issue 1966, page 36*.

The Contribution of the American Universities to Modern Art

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by François Stahly

The author, who from 1960 to 1965 was active as a teacher and sculptor at a number of American universities, such as the University of California (Berkeley), Seattle and Stanford as well as in Aspen, describes the part played by the American universities in the artistic life of the country. Most of the well-known artists of America began as leading pupils in the Art Department of a university and later functioned as teachers in such a department. These Art Departments do not necessarily provide complete professional training. Also architects, archaeologists and art historians are obliged to attend courses in these departments for a period of one or two quarters. In view of the open-mindedness of the Americans towards all new ideas, the teachers in the Art Departments have an opportunity to organize their programs with great freedom and in a spirit of improvisation. An example of this is the practice of inviting a man to come as 'artist in residence', there being expected from the artists not instruction as such but rather an exchange of ideas and the radiating influence of their work. As in the field of technology, the universities provide the arts with the means to engage in experimental research, and the Art Department of a university can become the arbiter of the arts for an entire region of the country. Finally, the universities help the artist in connection with his public assignments on the building site, where, owing to the severe division of labour, numerous organizational problems arise.

The American Museum as School and as Cultural Centre

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by Hans Christoph von Tavel

In Europe museums are often but repositories and centres of scholarly research, but in the United States they intervene actively in the cultural life of the country, as cultural centres and agents of art education. What is more, the art museums and their collecting activity are focused on the training of students, schoolchildren and the people in general, which means that other functions, especially scholarship, often suffer neglect. As an example of a museum that is geared almost exclusively to 'education', the author cites Colonial Williamsburg, the old capital of Virginia. Here a historic town of the 18th century, which had nearly vanished, was reconstructed in its original architectural style. Old handicrafts are on display, a historical film is shown, and guides are available. – In the art museums special attention is devoted to careful labelling, booklets are distributed, guided tours and courses are organized. Instruction begins with children of school age. For them as well as for adults there are drawing and painting courses. An elaborate system of associations promotes the activity of the museum as a cultural centre. Numerous committees superintend the various cultural and social activities.