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Our current special issue on Commercial Art in Switzerland 333

A prior special issue on the same subject appeared in August 1943. The Zürich Exhibition (Spring 1955) "The Commercial Artist at Work", has convinced us that it would be useful to devote a new issue to the same specialized fields. Karl Gerstner, apart from editing the two main articles, has collected the material for this issue and been responsible for its lay-out, to which in general, WERK, from the point of view of typography, will conform in its series of next year.

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Design in Advertising 335

Some Aspects of the Situation, by Karl Gerstner

The USA, in 1951, spent 6.5 thousand millions on advertising, that is, 170 Sfr. per capita. European countries, including Switzerland, are far from such a budget, but the trend is in the same direction and it is easy to imagine how the artists who form a part of the huge modern advertising industry would be tempted to see only the big money-making possibilities in it. K. G., on the other hand, like a number of his fellow artists, considers that in such circumstances everyone involved should in the first instance be moved to take a more serious view of the ethics of his profession. He stresses essentially the responsibilities which in his view are entailed in the applied arts: responsibility to the job to be done (to help familiarize and disseminate economic or cultural goods), and responsibility to the demands of design. – It would be useless, in his view, to compare, as we often do, pure art and the art of advertising (in spite of fruitful analogies between such and such modern advertising designs and the most bold ventures in contemporary art). More instructive is a comparison with special fields that are more subject to practical requirements, such as architecture, the decorative arts and industrial design, which, likewise, are all syntheses of function and "medium". – Moreover this relationship requires to be put on a practical footing: the interconnections among the numerous specialized fields in question should be reflected in an ever closer co-operation with other creative works done by architects (for exhibitions), engineers, technicians, etc.

"The Commercial Artist at Work" 339

Exhibition held in the Museum of Decorative Arts, Zürich, by Willy Rotzler

This exhibition (February–March 1955) was organized by G. Honegger-Lavater and aimed essentially at giving an overall view of a profession and its status in contemporary society. Instead of merely assembling a display of more or less recently created designs, it sought, in the first section, to reveal, as it were, the personality of the commercial artist (his training, his social status, his "obligations", his relation to pure art, etc.), and, in the second section, to display the 60 kinds of undertaking with which the commercial artist, by reason of his function, is in close touch. The exhibition catalogue, in pamphlet form, has been well received both here and abroad. Moreover, the main part of the exhibition was made up of units that could be easily dismantled, in view of the fact that this "nucleus" was to be a travelling exhibit not only in Switzerland but also abroad. – Included with it was a collection of designs presented by H. Fischer-Corso, which comprised selected creations by members of the Association of Swiss Commercial Artists, while at the same time there had been organized a large open-air poster display.

The Poster 343

by Armin Hofmann

A. H. gives us a survey of the various kinds of posters: posters composed of freely designed letters and lithographic, abstract and surrealist, photographic and typographic posters. The first was created essentially by Ernst Keller. The second has almost completely disappeared, for the artist no longer lithographs his works directly (as in the days of Toulouse-Lautrec), and the screen has replaced the stone. The third reveals the fructifying influence of experiments in modern art. As for the fourth, the public is often too timid to appreciate bold experiments. Here there is plenty of creative work being done in the printing shops; it has the advantage of being economical.

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The Advertisement 349

by S. Odermatt and W. Zürcher

It should: attract attention, convey a message objectively, make the customer adopt a favourable attitude, remain fixed in the memory. Unfortunately, as a whole, advertisements have scarcely developed for 20 years, mainly the advertisers, and also the editors, being at fault. A better understanding of the problem is called for, because the advertisement is one of the essential agents of mass psychology.

The Prospectus 354

by Kurt Wirth

Thanks to the possibilities of arrangement it offers, the prospectus, which is as it were the chamber music of advertising art, should above all aim at promoting "sales". And as in many cases it is kept and not thrown away, it has a more lasting influence than many other advertising media.

Trade Marks and Devices 358

by C. L. Vivarelli

Like every product of the art of advertising, but in a still more concentrated form perhaps, trade marks and devices have to combine effectively the visual aspects of these three components: the "message", the design and a process of reproduction.

Commercial Art in Switzerland 364

Prospects for the future, by Karl Gerstner

The great demand for commercial art entails the danger of striving for novelty at all costs. To avoid this risk, it should be realized that formal problems alone are no longer sufficient, but that it is suitable, in design adapted for advertising and propaganda purposes, to integrate the problem of form with the various human activities – economic, technical and social – served by this art. Thus, far from existing in and for itself, each advertising design becomes an integral part of a larger project which transcends it. – This idea, which he expects to yield results most helpful to the further development of commercial art, K. G. illustrates with 3 examples: 1. first stage of integration (pages 366 and 367), publicity for J. R. Geigy and Co. (integration in the means of expression, style and unity in the point of view); 2. second stage: publications and posters of the Institute of Adult Education, Ulm (pages 368 and 369); the unity in the means of expression provides a standard which has resulted in the very existence of this Institute becoming identified with its posters; 3. third stage of integration: publicity for St. Raphaël Quinquina (pages 370 and 371); this poster retains only the colours of the old one and thus, freed from all necessity of alluding to the "subject", it is reduced to its bare graphic elements which makes it possible to regard them in advance as standard units. – Such a structural integration, without by any means being erected into a system, can, in addition to its economic advantages, be expected to give a new basis for commercial art and to stimulate free, original creations.

The Training of the Commercial Artist 373

by Robert Gessner

R. G. too stresses the responsibilities inherent in the commercial artist's profession, which should be aroused very early in the training of apprentices for this profession. These apprentices must at the same time be made aware of the numerous other specialized lines they will have to co-operate with. Without pretending to be an educator of the public, the commercial artist must realize, in fact, that he is eminently qualified to help form the general public's taste, and even its mentality. – The artist-to-be has at his disposal two ways of preparing himself for his professional career: apprenticeship, and, on the other hand, attendance at a good school of applied arts. It is useful to complete the apprenticeship by courses in a good art school; as for the school itself, it would be desirable if the classes were not too large, if the instruction, far from being theoretical, were accompanied by practical projects (e.g. in the school), and if the program were, as a minimum, to meet the requirements of the federal regulations on the training of commercial artists.