

Zeitschrift: Das Werk : Architektur und Kunst = L'oeuvre : architecture et art
Band: 43 (1956)
Heft: 9: Schweizerischer Werkbund; Schweizerischer Kunstverein

Rubrik: Summaries in English

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The WERKBUND and Objects of Everyday Use

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by Hans Finsler

In this lecture delivered on the occasion of the general conference of the Swiss WERKBUND at St. Gallen (Nov. 5, 1955), H. F. dealt with the following three questions: 1. *What is the meaning for man of the objects of everyday use the WERKBUND champions? Are the "remainders of objects" in the paintings of Picasso, Braque or Juan Gris, during the transition period between representational art and the other, "final objects"?* Or are there in fact fashioned objects which belong to man almost in the way his own organs are a part of him? Unfortunately, in the case of most of our utensils, the old unity of man and object has, at least in our country, been practically lost. Is it objects as such the WERKBUND champions – or their (good) design? For there exists the danger that design may be divorced from the object as such. Now, man is the originator of fashioned objects: there is no design without man's creativity, – there is no human culture properly speaking without its design. – 2. *By virtue of what criteria does the WERKBUND judge objects?* Not long ago the WERKBUND used to say: an object is good if it is in conformity with the spirit of its material, considered both in its economic and functional aspects. But we know today that is not sufficient: design, what we refer to as style (in the sense of style of life), however divorced these ideas may be from our logic, is indispensable. Two formal trends are equally prevailing today: the rational trend, geometrical and abstract (Gropius, Mies van der Rohe, Le Corbusier), – and the non-constructive trend, but abstract-organic (F. L. Wright, A. Alto). Both, like every living design, have their justification within themselves and there alone. – 3. *What contribution does the WERKBUND make to the creation of objects of everyday use?* By definition, the WERKBUND is not a creator. It has other tasks, but they are not less essential. The WERKBUND is a conscience, and it will have to continue in being as long as the producers have no awareness of their responsibilities towards objects of use, and as long as the consumers have no sensitivity to the truth inherent in objects. To be sure, partial results have already been achieved (Neubühl Garden City, the Swiss National Exhibition of '39), but the beautiful objects in Italy, the vitality of the French style, the creations of Sweden and Finland are as much as expressions of what we lack most: the union of the human being and the objects which express his being by serving his needs. Hence the importance, if this lack is to be made good, of the questions of education and instruction and international contacts. Design alone is not important, but the intimate union of man and his creations.

Good Design, 1956

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by Alfred Roth

The "good design" campaign, launched jointly by the Swiss Werkbund and the Industrial Fair in Basle, consists in a jury composed of members recommended by these two institutions awarding annually a citation to those firms whose products reveal good design. This campaign is to be supported in the future by others (press, radio, display in shop-windows, etc.) and by educational work (especially in teachers' training schools). Moreover, the producers ought to participate more in the jury, and the Werkbund ought to concern itself still more with publicizing as much as possible the quest for an increasing harmony between mind and objects, utility and beauty.

Department Store and Good Design

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by E. H. Mahler

In this address delivered at the opening of the Exhibition of American Industrial Design organized in the Globus department store in Zurich, on the basis of a selection for which we are indebted to the Pratt Institute in Brooklyn and with the collaboration of the School of Applied Arts in Zurich, Mr. E. H. M. stressed that trade, by its very nature as intermediary, can also function as a middleman between modern design and the public. And this all the more since good design is itself an excellent sales argument. Hence the utility, both ideal and economic, of proceeding to the aesthetic education of the public, as well as that of salesmen. – The Globus store will award a prize each year for good design.

New Radio Sets

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Radio sets of modern design are rare, notable exceptions being the American "Halikrafter" and the Austrian "Radione". Also it is gratifying that the firm of Braun (Frankfurt) has, after a serious market survey, put on the market radio sets (record-players also) the design of which was conceived by associates of the henceforth famous "Hochschule für Gestaltung" in Ulm.

The 150th Anniversary of the Swiss Society of Fine Arts

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by Max Huggler

The first societies of Fine Arts, which were still cantonal, make their appearance in 1805 or 1806, then they amalgamate in 1839, what's more not assuming their present name until 1866. For a long time the level left much to be desired (exhibitions without a jury, and regional), in part because the dominant ideas (German idealism and democracy in the spirit of '48) induced people to see in art above all a means of patriotic education. And even when Hodler, in his Marignan compositions realized this program, the Society was not cognizant of it. The Federal Commission of Fine Arts was alone in organizing the first national Exhibitions. But fortunately, times have vastly changed, for it was the Society which organized the beautiful national exhibitions of 1944 (Geneva), 1951 (Berne) and 1956 (Basle). – Let us not forget, however, that, even before the present fortunate period, the Society, among other things, created the Dictionary of Swiss Artists (the 5th volume of which will appear in 1957) and contributed in a useful way to the composition of numerous museums in our country.

Masterpieces of Swiss Art

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by Hugo Wagner

On the occasion of its 150th anniversary, the Swiss Society of Fine Arts presents at Zofingen, the place where it was founded, an Exhibition of Masterpieces of Swiss Art from 1800 to 1950. Arranged by Hugo Wagner, actuary of the Society, the works assembled (on the average 3 only per artist) are due almost without exception to dead artists. In view of the decrepit character of the majority of 19th century sculptures, sculpture is in part represented, more so than painting, by some artists who are still alive.

Purchases by the Confederation at the Swiss Exhibition of 1956

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The exhibitions of the Swiss Society of Fine Arts are able more quickly to welcome new trends than the exhibitions of the Society of Swiss Painters, Sculptors and Architects which are open only to members. – The 3 large exhibitions of '46 (Geneva), '51 (Berne) and '56 (Basle) reveal a progressive integration of abstract art in Swiss artistic life as a whole – and even in Basle, the "abstracts" were no longer presented in a section apart. The same freedom of judgment is manifested in the purchases by the Confederation at the Exhibition of '56: out of 6 works acquired, 1 is, more or less, non-representational, and besides, it was not selected at all for reasons of program, but solely on the strength of its quality.