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About the Achievement of Richard Neutra

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by Benedikt Huber

In October, R. N. paid a brief visit to Switzerland, delivering some lectures here, so that it is more than timely if on this occasion we attempt to outline his leading conceptions. As he has explained in his book "Survival through Design" (and also in "Life and Human Habitat"), modern science has rendered outmoded the doctrine of the five senses. In contrast to the engineer, the architect should concern himself with the infinitesimal quanta of energy on which our spiritual states depend. N. is concerned much more with human nature than with new construction methods or new materials. Also he always requests his clients (husband and wife separately) to draw up a description of their habits, of their way of life. On this basis he can induce the real wishes of those whose homes he undertakes to build: the fulfillment of these wishes, that, for N., is the essential goal of the architect designing private homes. In his view, "architecture is applied biology". And let us note carefully that the importance of such or such a detail is not to be gauged by the frequency of its utilization. Even if it is perfectly true that the words "inhabit" and "habit" have the same root, the happiness that can be conferred by a house often consists, as in life in general, in a few radiant points that have the power of illuminating all the others.

Private Home at Olten

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1956, Architect: H. Zaugg FAS/SIA, Olten; Engineer: E. Schild, Basle

This house is occupied by the architect himself and his family of six. It is a deliberate experiment which sets out to satisfy the requirements of group living, while at the same time not losing sight of the personal needs of the individual. The basic element of the plan is drawn from the modulator of Le Corbusier.

The Art of Good Seating

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by Werner Blaser

Most modern seats have the defect of fitting the shape of the body too closely and so being uncomfortable through their very excess of comfort, in the sense that they restrict freedom of movement and therefore render impossible genuine relaxation. The Far East has something to teach us as regards the art of good seating, some real wisdom in fact: relaxation of the body signifies concentration of the mind. It is with a view to encouraging the latter that the author has created seats the supporting part of which is circular. Same principle applied to the backs. The conservatism in design tends to assure physical well-being, and helps the seated person to collect his scattered thoughts in tranquillity.

Three Houses in Oslo

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1954, Private Homes of Architects A. Korsmo and Chr. Norberg-Schultz

3 two-storey houses connected together by a one-storey structure devoted to utility rooms. The exteriors are homogeneous, but there is great variety in the disposition of interior arrangements. In Korsmo's house, movable partitions and a staircase which can be raised mechanically permit the transformation of the living-room into a room for receptions, exhibitions or concerts. In Norberg-Schultz's house, it was sought above all to create a large room taking up part of 2 floors.

The Notion of the Void in Far Eastern Art

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by Albert Theille

In the excellent Rietberg Museum, in Zurich, where there is an admirable collection of masterpieces of Asiatic art, the visitor is presented at the entrance with explanatory texts explaining that art can assume the following three aspects: it can be Impressive (tending to a faithful imitation of nature), Expressive (expression of the interior life) or Constructive (primacy of reason and pure forms). Now, as the eminent Japanese critic, Michio Takayama, recently pointed out, these definitions, though they are to the point, are nevertheless Western definitions and overlook the most important element of the art of the Far East, i. e., its suggestivity. In order really to grasp the essence of the latter as it is understood by the Far East, it is necessary to get some insight into the spiritual outlook defined in Zen Buddhism, which has exerted such a decisive influence, in China on painting since the 6th century and, in Japan on culture in general.

All initiates insist on the fact that Zen can not be expressed in words, indicating in this way that it does not involve a rational concept. It should be sufficient to say at this point that the secret designated by this term (Japanese form of Chinese "ch'an", which in turn is a transposition of Sanskrit "dhyāna", meditation) implies the idea of "way toward the void" at the same time as the idea of the pure "void" to which Buddhist contemplation aspires. By and large, it could be said that Zen is a way toward identification with the absolute, an identification which is not at all attained by the fullness of the presence of being, but thanks to a choice; therefore, as it were, to an absence which is nevertheless the potential presence of all that it eliminates. In thought as in art, a single essential point suggests the Whole. To take a commonplace example, we can think of the spiritual state of the angler whose mind focused on the cork floater makes vivid the void of time and space. Kyoto was the centre of this aesthetics, in terms of which we ought to understand, for example, the garden of the Ryoan-ji: a few stones to serve as accents and a sandy expanse thanks to which the void, mere nothingness, attains being and becomes alive. - What is astonishing and no less essential, this outlook permits us to understand much better too certain of the most recent Western creations, Calder's mobiles, for example, which are not abstractions at all, but on the contrary effective means to seize upon concrete spatial relationships. It is of pressing importance in the world of today to have a compromise between the Far Eastern and the Western points of view.

Marguerite Ammann

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by Maria Netter

M. A. was born in Basle in 1911 and was a student at the School of Decorative Arts in her native city, then at the School of Applied Arts in Stuttgart. She was a style designer for "Vogue" (London) and spent the following 2 years in Egypt, having given up applied art for pure art. She has been happily unsuccessful in her endeavour to represent reality exactly, and her inspiration has a narrative, legendary quality; but this does not mean that she is, for this reason, to be classed as a naïve painter. Her art, outside the time dimension as it were, simply invests with reality her personal myths, in which there are fused in a higher unity the self and the world, the real and the abstract.

Modern Building Games

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by Hans-Friedrich Geist

In his work bearing the title "Total Architecture", W. Gropius submits that it is impossible to hope for a true architectural culture without endeavouring to educate the public, and that from an early age, from infancy, beginning with toys which waken and stimulate the sense of good design. Hence the importance of the new building games presented here. They are not intended for very small children, but for older children, for adolescents and even for adults. (Games are important for the adult, as an escape from the excessive technical specialization of our machine civilization.) Games of this kind will encourage a passion for putting things together and will vivify the imagination. With respect to the latter, it is advisable not to use models, or to rely on recollections: youth wants to invent new things and live immersed in the life of its own time.