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Architecture at the Brussels World Fair

by Benedikt Huber

From the point of view of architecture, the Brussels Fair of 1958, if it does not seem to have produced many really accomplished solutions, at least has this highly interesting fact in its favour: that the different constructions which could be seen there are symptomatic representations of the way in which the various countries attempt to present an image of themselves. In this connection, the most striking examples were the pavilions of the United States, Russia and France: the first, anxious not to over-emphasize the material might of that country, had an atmosphere almost lower-middle-class in its mixture of colonial and decorative style – the second, in spite of a well-conceived and pleasing construction, was nothing but "big" –; the third, finally, which should have demonstrated once again the "French genius", gathered together in a modernistic building an impossible excess of objects on display. In addition to the simple and neat architecture to be found in the German and Austrian pavilions, it was mainly those of Japan and Finland which, by virtue of their feeling for material, achieved the most successful results. Honourable mention should also be given to Switzerland, Norway and Holland, as well as Yugoslavia, Brazil and Israel, among others. But above all, in spite of a somehow inadequate execution, the Electronic Poem by Le Corbusier, an attempt at a new synthesis of the various arts, was one of the few offerings yielding a key to the possibilities of the future.

The Swiss Pavilion at the Brussels World Fair, 1958

Arch.: W. Gantenbein, SIA, Zürich, in collaboration with H. Siegle, arch., Zürich, and R. Siebold, arch., Zürich

Twelve young architects were invited to compete in designing the Swiss pavilion. The solution accepted, which took particular account of the natural features of the site at disposal, is purposely small in scale and conforms to the circumstances in a realistic manner. It was sought to exhibit unity within multiplicity, this by means of a spatial system based on a 125 sq.m. hexagonal unit. Since the Swiss Confederation only paid a fixed sum to cover the whole project, it was necessary to select the objects displayed with great care.

Emblematic Architecture in World Fairs

by Werner Hoffmann

For more than a hundred years, the World Fairs have offered a picture of Western civilisation, and their architectural embodiments have fallen into three categories: constructions of the first rank (Crystal Palace, Eiffel Tower, Gallery of Machines) – utilitarian and pompous buildings which have deservedly passed into oblivion –, and finally architectural fancies which amount to emblems of the religion of progress. It is to the latter category that the author has devoted his study, taking into consideration both projects which have been carried out and those which never got past the planning stage – all works which combine the characteristics of monuments, buildings and pure decoration. The Brussels Fair offers, on a more intimate scale, numerous examples of such works recalling the enthusiasms of the 19th century. In addition to the "cosmic" architecture of the plan for a cenotaph for Newton (by Boulée, 1784), the author recalls the megalomaniac dreaming of the Saint-Simonians, of Enfantin, for example, who was eager for the birth of a "molecular" architecture – this idea can be considered as a foreshadowing of the Brussels Atomium – and also of a "musical" architecture, in which cast iron tubes would be organ pipes in a building utilising all of the resources of industry in an endeavour to create a temple of progress. We meet mystic architecture again in the expressionist period (the Glass House of Bruno Taut) and today as well, in the Electronic Poem of Le Corbusier. Every World Fair is, in its own way, both a Tower of Babel and a herald of the New Jerusalem.

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SAFFA 1958, Zürich. – Second Exhibition "The Swiss Woman, Her Life and Her Work"

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Chief arch.: Annemarie Hubacher-Constam, in collaboration with Swiss women architects and graphic artists
by Lisbeth Sachs

This exhibition, which takes its name from the initials of the German words meaning "Exhibition of the Swiss Woman at Work", is made up of an avenue of shops, cultural buildings and places of worship (a theatre, a clubhouse and a church intended for both Protestant and Catholic worship), circular exhibition halls, various restaurants and a multi-storied building serving to illustrate problems of city-planning and housing, as well as a one-family model house, a patio house and a "Trigone" vacation house. The graphic arts display contributes a tone of tastefulness and discretion. It is to be hoped that many of the improvisations introduced at SAFFA will be allowed to contribute their spirit of spontaneity and originality to architecture, both general and utilitarian.

The Swiss Woman and the Art of Tapestry-making

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by Ursula Isler-Hungerbühler

As distinguished from Sweden or France, Switzerland does not have, in the art of tapestry-making, a centuries-old tradition – this art has not flourished for more than fifty years in Switzerland. Its chief representatives have been women. An eminent position belongs to Sophie Taeuber-Arp, who from 1916 to 1929 conducted the tapestry classes at the School of Applied Arts in Zürich – her work and that of her students is characterised by a formal purity of style which is well-nigh ascetic. In contrast, 35 years ago Lise Gujer, in Davos, working from the cartoons of E. L. Kirchner, created a more earthy, more colourful type of tapestry, the influence of which has been equally pronounced. At the present time, Elsi Giauque teaches the tapestry class at the School of Applied Arts in Zürich. We must also mention such exacting tapestry-makers as Maria Gerde-Tobler, Lotti Kramer, Maya Eichenberger, Elisabeth Giauque, Verena Jaggi, Lilly Keller, and Ruth Zürcher.

The Bührle Collection at the Zürich Kunsthau

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by Max Huggler

The new wing of the Zürich Kunsthau was given a magnificent inauguration with the exhibition of the Bührle collection, one of the few which has been assembled since the Second World War. There is without doubt no exhibition to be seen in Europe which offers such an amazingly complete coverage of the masters of French impressionism (in the broader meaning of the term impressionism, i.e. painting before fauvism). If the human form only appears occasionally in the eleven paintings by Manet (with incomparable chromatic force), it plays a more prominent role in the Cézannes ("Lady with Fan", "Young Man with Red Vest", and the quasi-impersonal self-portrait). Also well represented are, beside early Renoirs and Monets, Toulouse-Lautrec and Van Gogh, as well as late Gauguin. We must also not fail to mention the Vuillards and the Bonnard, and especially the fact that, for the first time in a Swiss collection, Degas is given a place commensurate with his genius (especially with the painting "Madame Camus at the Piano"). Evidently, the taste of this collector does not favour the 20th century with equal enthusiasm. – On the other hand, the Dutch masters (a certain portrait by Frans Hals is perhaps the most beautiful painting in this collection) and Medieval German art (in particular, the Feldkirch altar-piece by Wolf Huber) serve to make this exhibition truly representative and of world-wide importance.