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Disciples, Trends and Problems in Contemporary Architecture

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On the Work of Tapio Wirkkala

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*by Benedikt Huber**by Benedikt Huber*

The contemporary situation can be defined by the fact that the word "modern" as applied to architecture has ceased being, as it still was some ten years ago, a bogey to frighten the bourgeois and has become just the contrary, a publicity slogan. The very projects realized for essentially speculative reasons only don the mask of "modernity" because the public has finally decided that it wants novelty at all costs. As for buildings embodying a more serious design, their architecture does not, as in previous ages, reflect a general style but rather allegiance to such and such a personality or such and such a restricted group, whether Wright, Mies van der Rohe and Gropius, Neutra, Alvar Aalto or Le Corbusier. To be sure, the simultaneous existence of these various distinct trends is not an evil in and for itself, but we are confronted less by a group spirit than by the problematic forcible juxtaposition of different "styles", as is nearly always revealed by the competitions organized in our country. The formalism resulting from this [state of affairs, which formalism is more than encouraged by an economic boom leaving scarcely any time for reflection, means that infinitely more important problems, such as that of town-planning, remain on the abstract plane alone. Until there is some drastic change, everything in the way of research and actual projects is being done on a purely individualist basis.

In a characteristically Finnish way, the artist Wirkkala began with the applied arts, for he first designed and created articles for mass production and rapidly achieved an international reputation with his glassware; to this day he supervises the mass production of glassware at the Karhula-littala works. The same concern with the properties of material both raw and transmuted by design appears in his carvings on wood, free constructions which are aerodynamic, as it were, applying an entirely new laminated technique.

Alexander Calder

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by Helmi Gasser

The American sculptor Alexander Calder (born in Philadelphia in 1898) has achieved worldwide fame with his mobiles. These creations, consisting of metal wires and surfaces constantly undergoing metamorphoses owing to their movement, are only approximately subsumed under the designation "sculpture", which generally evokes the idea of stability between spatial relationships and material volumes. Calder was a student of mechanical engineering. Hence his familiarity with mechanical principles and dynamic systems. His creations, however, are at the same time the products of a spirit of play. One of his first constructions was a miniature circus, consisting of metal wires. Calder's inventions are the artistic transposition of vital rhythms, of movement and radiation, and for this reason they are intensely related to the surrounding space which is animated by their presence. They are related to vegetable and animal organisms. In this respect they differ from the kinetic sculptures of the Twenties created by the Russians Gabo and Pevsner. Their natural delicacy and their humour give them much in common with the painting of Miró.

The Importance of F. L. Wright in the Development of Contemporary Architecture

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by Werner M. Moser

W. M. M., reviewing the criticisms levelled at F. L. W. by the younger generation which reproaches him for his romanticism and his individualism, endeavours to show that the influence of this master, one of the first to adopt the functional point of view and who succeeded in making it evident that the additive geometric order can be advantageously replaced by a dynamic synthesis of formal elements, continues to be operative in the vital architecture of our time.

The Mural Paintings in the Basle Municipal Hospital

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As one of the architects of the hospital, Hermann Baur expresses his satisfaction at this important demonstration of collaboration between painting and architecture. Hans Stocker, who with three other Basle painters, E. Baumann, M. Christ and K. Moor, executed the murals covering an area of 285 sq. m., reports on this collective achievement, which was under his direction. Finally, Heinz Keller, adopting the critic's point of view, observes that it is only to be regretted that the project in question, devoted to the theme of the four seasons and the stages in the human life span, is situated so that the garden on to which the hall looks can be seen at the same time; thus the murals are subjected to rather dangerous competition with real nature, whereas a less realistic conception would have avoided the danger of such an individual comparison. H. K. at the same time pays all due respect to the special gifts of the Basle school of mural painters.

Frank Lloyd Wright: A Testament

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The current issue reproduces some extracts from the last work (A Testament) of the great American architect, which cannot be completely summarized here. We can only point out, as does Mr. Benedikt Huber in his introductory remarks, that F. L. W., who dreamed of creating an architecture expressive of American democracy, found himself recognized essentially by the Western Europe that he repudiated, which in great measure accounts for the polemic tone of his personal writings.

Villa at Cologny (Geneva)

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Architect: G. Brera, FAS, Geneva

Villa comprising three distinct parts: lounge-reception room, guests, the owner's quarters, carried out on different levels, with a view on to the lake. Great sobriety in selection of materials and in colour scheme.

Town-Planning and the 19th-Century Heritage

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by R. D. Hohl

It was toward the middle of the 19th century that the modern age, initiated essentially by the creation of railways, involving the expansion of cities and the dismantling of old city walls, burst into the old towns of Switzerland. Although it is fashionable nowadays to condemn in entirety all the architecture of that period, the fact remains that this architecture very often represents, at least functionally, a viable solution to town-planning problems which our own age has not been capable of. We owe it the minimum respect due to anything that in its own way authentically expresses a given situation. This is all the more true as the architects of the period in question, aided by study on the spot in Paris, Berlin and in other German cities, were able to attain to a degree of technical mastery which it would be unfair to despise, and that without ever being corrupted into turning out barrack-like tenements such as are to be found elsewhere. If, and this is most fortunate, the maintenance and the intelligent preservation of the older districts of towns is nowadays regarded as a *sine qua non*, it is high time we realized that many 19th-century architectural groups deserve similar treatment and that certain ill-conceived "modernization" schemes should give way to what our fathers and grandfathers knew better than we how to create—squares, harmonious streets, etc.—in the sense of what still perhaps had no name in those days but was a reality: town-planning.