

Art and design : presentations given at the 12th colloquium of the Association of Art Historians in Switzerland, Zurich, November 7/8, 1987

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Objektyp: **Preface**

Zeitschrift: **Zeitschrift für schweizerische Archäologie und Kunstgeschichte = Revue suisse d'art et d'archéologie = Rivista svizzera d'arte e d'archeologia = Journal of Swiss archeology and art history**

Band (Jahr): **45 (1988)**

Heft 1: **Kunst und Gestaltung = Art et design = Arte e "design"**

PDF erstellt am: **20.09.2024**

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ART AND DESIGN

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INTRODUCTION

For the first time, the annual meeting of art historians in Switzerland was addressed to issues of contemporary art. The discussion on last year's "Documenta" in Kassel was centered on the controversial confrontation between *art and composition* or *art and design*. Questions concerning autonomy and functionality of art and design – and their equivalence – gave way to heated arguments which still persist. "The object of the late 80s" as postulated by MANFRED SCHNECKENBURGER in the catalogue of exhibition, "can change its status at any time and be put back onto the shelf: object and product, art and life, neatly separated and animated only by art".

The potential difference between art and design was one of the main issues at the colloquium and gave rise to a fruitful dialogue among artists and designers, as well as scientists and theorists. The papers – written in the form of a thesis and reproduced in their original form – are challenging and provoke constructive opposition. Some very heterogeneous viewpoints have been advanced, as reflected by the titles chosen for these papers. Topics range from the correlation between art and design to the question of use and significance of designed objects. The status of design today,

its cultural, social and political relevance are examined closely. Existing definitions have been clarified and new ones explored. Especially informative are comments by the participating artists and designers, who set forth their opinions with force and clarity.

In her paper, MARGIT WEINBERG STABER points out with good reason that the phenomenon of design has been neglected by art historians. She proposes the foundation of a Swiss research center for design. This call to extend the domain of "art history" was met with approval by the colloquium.

In a survey on the origins of political research, addressed to the Swiss Academy of the Arts and the Swiss Council of Science, OSKAR BÄTSCHMANN suggests that the traditional distinction between the subject matter of art history and the artistic production of the 20th century is no longer viable. He predicts a change of art history in the direction of a science of visual cultures, which will necessitate an increase in interdisciplinary efforts. Thus, the colloquium may be considered a stepping stone in a new development that is already in progress.

Cäsar Menz