

# Exposition architecture

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# **The Bulletin of The Museum of Modern Art**



A view of the Stockholm Exposition, 1930, designed by Gunnar Asplund.

## **Exposition Architecture**

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## Exposition Architecture

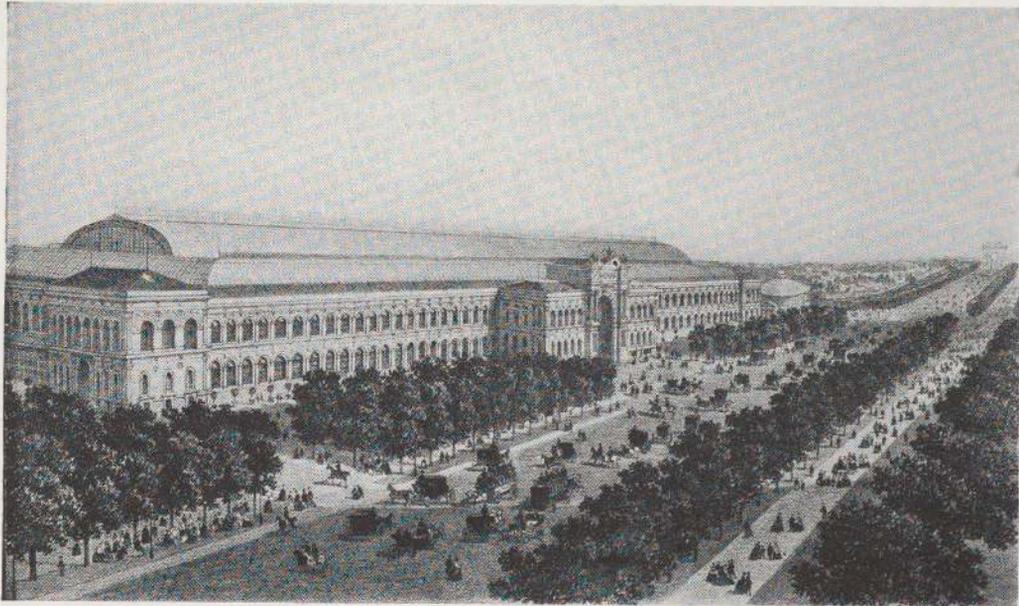
Expositions, like skyscrapers, dramatize architecture for the general public. Hence they have an influence upon architectural history far greater than their intrinsic importance. Their particular atmosphere of holiday and ballyhoo, their very transience, indeed, appeal to the imagination of a wide public which is otherwise rarely stirred by any ideas of architecture at all. Real innovations of structure or design seldom make their first appearance in expositions. But World's Fairs are sounding boards for ideas, both good and bad, which have already taken solid form under more obscure conditions.

At the first World's Fair, the Great Exposition of 1851 in London, the English saw a building of whose like few had ever dreamed. Technically Paxton's Crystal Palace was no more than an enlargement of the Palm House at Chatsworth which he had designed over a decade earlier. Yet visitors to the Crystal Palace saw a vision of buildings all of metal and glass—a vision which the architects and engineers of the time were incapable of realizing on any general scale.

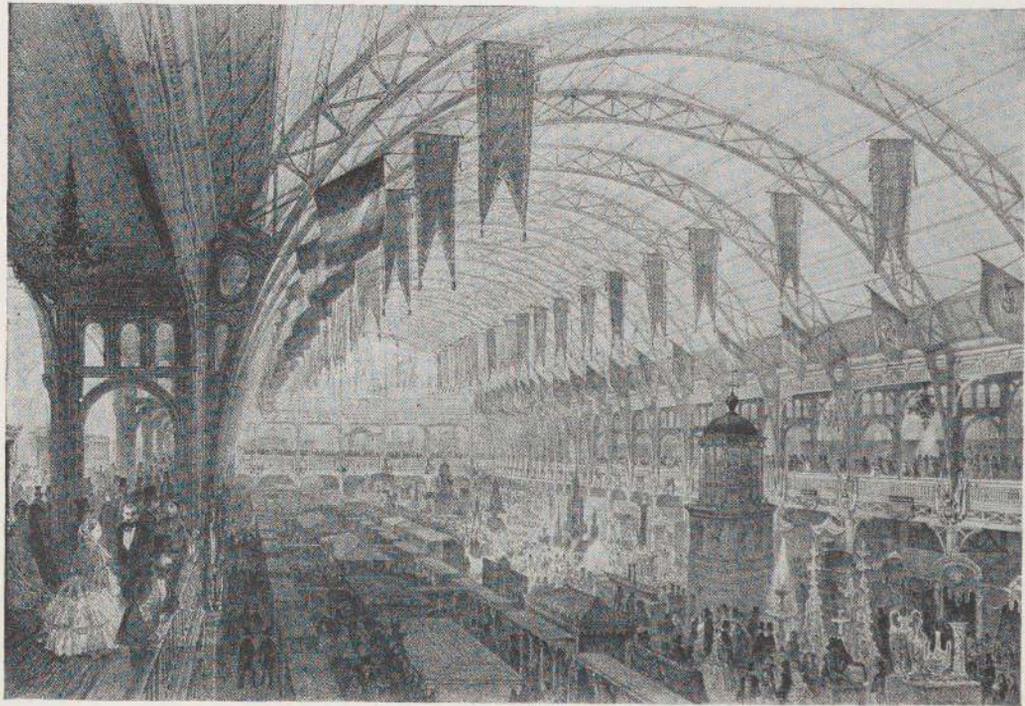
At the next important exposition, held in Paris in 1855, the designer compromised with conventional architecture because the exposition building was intended as a permanent monument on a prominent urban site. The architect, Cendrier, was responsible for many of the excellent stations of the Paris-Lyons-Mediterranée railroad. As in these stations, he used for the exterior masonry walls of the exposition building a cold but well-proportioned Neo-Grec style. The metalwork is completely visible only in the interior.

More interesting was the long metal gallery at the Paris exposition of 1878. Here Eiffel's engineering was not hidden by masonry. Instead the metalwork itself was decorated with fantastic detail in color. The result is open to criticism on the score of taste, but the principle was surely correct: to devise a festive and appropriate decorative treatment directly in terms of the materials used. Two years earlier, something of the same principle had controlled, with unfortunate results, the design of the larger halls at the Philadelphia Centennial Exposition. Not only was Schwartzmann inferior to Eiffel in the boldness and simplicity of his engineering: in comparison with his decoration, that of the Paris exposition appears refined and distinguished.

The expositions of the fifties were sufficiently small so that the greater part of their exhibits could be displayed within a single building of enormous size. Therefore, the problem of a general plan for the exposition hardly existed. The designing of the single building involved little more than the problem of pro-



**Exterior: Palais de l'Industrie, Paris Exposition, 1855, by Cendrier and Viel**



**Interior: Palais de l'Industrie, Paris Exposition, 1855, by Cendrier and Viel**

viding an enormous hall with several storeys of galleries at the side. Furthermore, it was not difficult to find a suitable site rather near the center of the city—an important consideration, since such locations minimized the problem of transportation and made the exposition buildings a definite feature of city life.

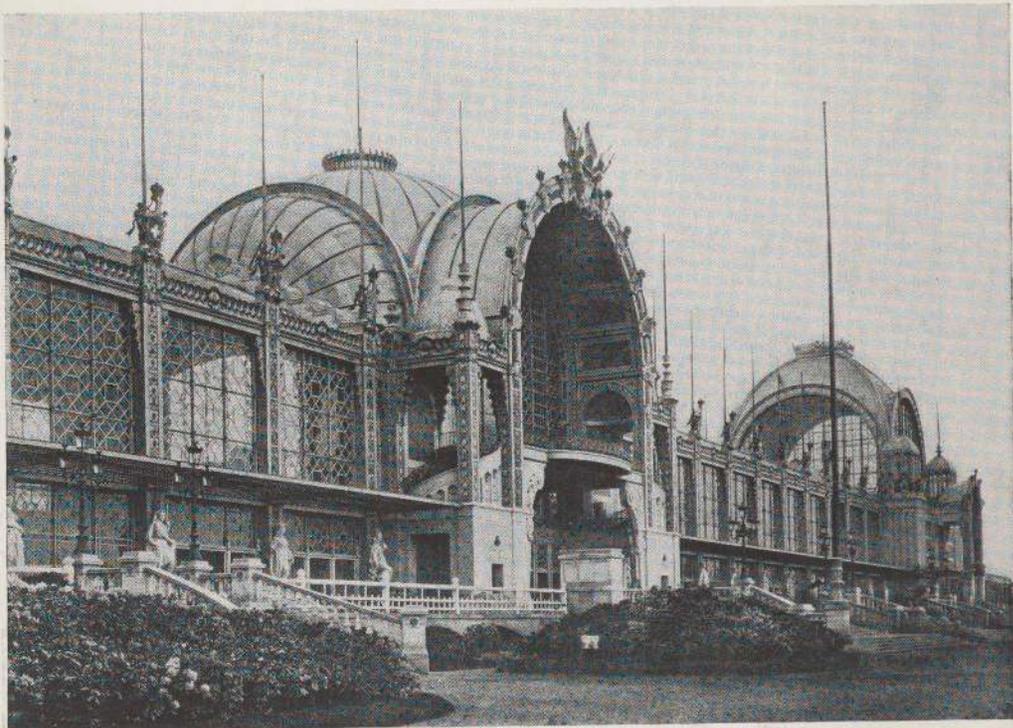
In the last quarter of the nineteenth century, expositions grew larger. They required more than one building and, consequently, larger open areas than were generally available within the existing cities. In Paris, however, such an exposition as that of 1878<sup>1</sup> was laid out in relation to one of the magnificent city-planning schemes of the eighteenth century. The permanent building, the Trocadéro, occupied a raised site in Passy. It faced Gabriel's Ecole de Guerre across the open space of the Champs de Mars where the other pavilions were grouped. The exposition, in other words, was integrated with the actual plan of the city and served to develop a new quarter.

This was scarcely the case in Philadelphia. Fairmount Park was little related to the existing city plan, and the grouping of the exposition halls showed the worst effects of the late Romantic school of park design. The tradition was an unfortunate one; it stimulated the suburban diffusion already threatening American cities and made the exposition a sort of carnival suburb rather than an integrated feature of the metropolis.

To Americans the one World's Fair was that held in Chicago in 1893. Evaluation of this exposition is difficult. Its unfortunate general effect upon the architectural taste of the country prejudices one even against its virtues. Its location and general plan were certainly more intelligently studied than at the Philadelphia Centennial, and it is hardly the fault of the Fair's designers that the exposition site was not later incorporated within the metropolitan limits. Although rather far out of the existing city, it was not unreasonable to expect that Chicago would eventually expand so as to include it.

Earlier expositions, after they ceased to occupy a single building, had been increasingly disparate in design. The architects of the 1893 Chicago Fair are, therefore, to be praised for their decision to impose a general consistency of design, a fixed cornice line and a single color scheme. Equally important was their establishment of a well-ordered general plan. Unfortunately, in their understandable reaction against the esthetic chaos of the preceding age of experiment, they failed to take full advantage of the architectural possibilities

<sup>1</sup>The exposition of 1899 occupied the same area. Those of 1900 and 1925 were even further in toward the center of the city, covering the open space between the Champs Elysées and the Invalides.



Galleries, Paris Exposition, 1878, construction by Eiffel.

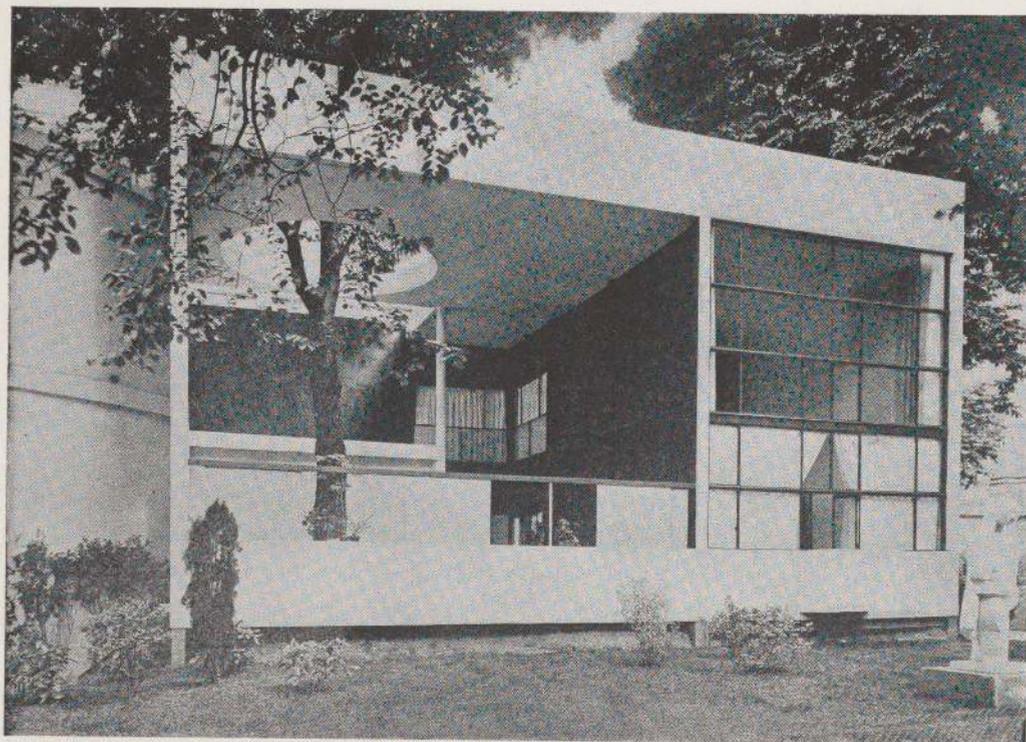
inherent in metal, glass and plaster—the materials they were forced to use. They imposed a discipline of classical masonry design which was reactionary and eminently unsuitable.<sup>1</sup>

The result of this discipline was a “vision of antique beauty,” much in the de Mille manner save for being entirely and arbitrarily white so that the exuberance of festive decoration was in some measure restrained to accord with the dignity of the pre-established plan and the pseudo-monumental scale. The after effects of this “vision” were unfortunate. In America, architects for two generations thought of urban embellishment chiefly in terms of making permanent the ephemeral glories of the World’s Fair. In Europe, succeeding expositions, particularly that at Paris in 1900, aimed too often at a comparable Classical magnificence.

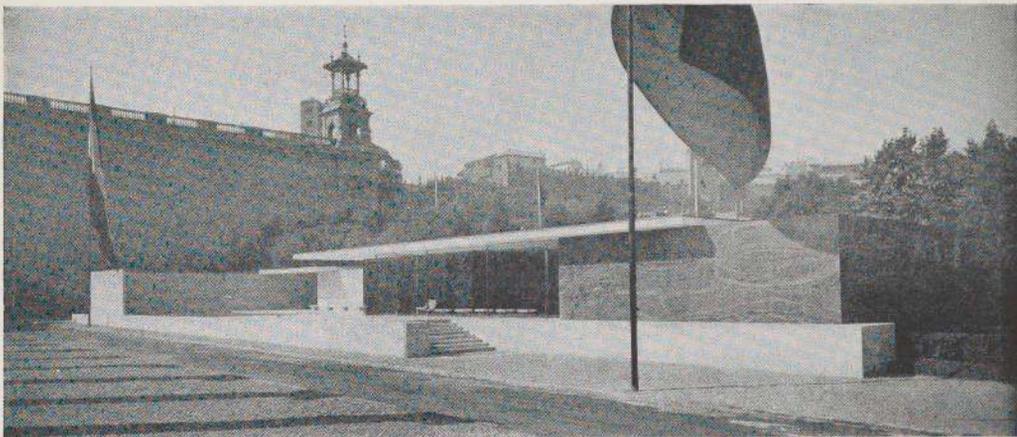
<sup>1</sup>Sullivan alone, in the Transportation Building, realized something of these inherent possibilities while preserving, at the same time, the imposed scale and general composition. Yet although this building was intrinsically superior, it broke the consistency of the putative Classical architecture of the Fair as a whole.

Whatever the results, however, the principles were correct, at least in part. An exposition is not a city which grows through the ages and in which a certain confusion in the general plan is the true expression of the changing urban functions of different periods. An exposition must have a rather rigid skeleton, if only to keep the visitor from getting lost, and it must have an imposed discipline of design in order to achieve some imaginative unity. Twentieth century expositions have usually had some sort of intelligible general plan, too often more plausible on paper than in execution, but, as the force of classical discipline has weakened, they have revealed less and less consistency of design. They have remained memorable for single buildings rather than for any homogeneous and spectacular visions—like the Paris exposition of 1889 which produced Eiffel's tower.

Twenty years ago, the Panama Pacific Exposition managed to create a certain theatrical gaiety which made up in part for the decadent classicism of its individual buildings. In 1925, however, the Paris exposition, dedicated chiefly



Pavillon de l'Esprit Nouveau, Paris Exposition, 1925, designed by Le Corbusier.



German Pavilion, Barcelona Exposition, 1927, designed by Miës van der Rohe.

to the Decorative Arts, was little more than a presentation of early twentieth century architectural styles of various European countries. Lost among Dutch and Danish brickwork, Austrian and Swedish stucco, obscured by the pompous scraped classicism of the official French architects, stood Le Corbusier's Pavilion de l'Esprit Nouveau, the vivid presage of an architecture just born. It is true that two years later this new architecture dominated the Housing Exposition at Stuttgart, but that was a specialized exposition. It was a sample modern suburb, intended to display the housing ideas of many different architects from several different countries, and, of necessity, it lacked consistency.

The last great German exposition before the War, when the *Jugendstil* of the early twentieth century was still very much alive, was that of the Werkbund at Cologne. This had been chiefly remarkable for isolated and essentially unrelated buildings. Neither Gropius nor Van de Velde set the key there, although each was represented by a prophetic demonstration of post-War design. The German expositions of the twenties, on the other hand, usually rather small and specialized, did achieve a kind of discipline in design. The Gesolei in Dusseldorf, the Pressa in Cologne and several others represented a rather successful general application of the then dying *Jugendstil*. Their uniformity was exceptional, however. At Antwerp, Brno and Barcelona, the expositions of the late twenties were all chaotic, although each had several excellent buildings. At Barcelona Miës van der Rohe's German Pavilion displayed a conception of modern architecture which was to modify markedly that presented by Le Corbusier at Paris in 1925.

The first exposition to apply consistently and throughout the principles of contemporary architecture was that held at Stockholm in 1930. The circumstances were unusual. The exposition was national and not international. It was designed almost entirely by a single architect, Gunnar Asplund, a man of fine taste and strong executive ability. The location was not far from the city, partly because Stockholm's admirably supervised suburban developments made it possible to find within walking distance untainted country of great charm.

The general plan was skilfully adapted to the natural beauties of the site. It was clear and simple, without being arbitrarily symmetrical or regular. The individual buildings followed a basically ordered scheme and yet were so diversified as to avoid monotony. The use of colour was restrained but admirably varied. The construction was obviously temporary yet properly finished, in marked contrast to the classical tradition of pseudo-permanent monumentality shoddily executed. In respect to architecture, Stockholm's was, undoubtedly, the model exposition, although it must be admitted that its small scale and limited scope made it unusually easy to control.

There was no reason to hope that the Scandinavian refinement would find an echo at Chicago in 1933, but one might have expected a greater clarity and simplicity in the general plan, a closer connection with the nearby city and some recognition of the potential advantages of a lake shore site. But the architecture was controlled by a group of men whose work on skyscrapers tended to dominate their sense of scale and form. This was even more fatal to the separate pavilions than to the general plan. Modernism in America seemed still to permit—if not actually to call for—every vagary of composition and ornament; and the color scheme, which might have brought some unity to a group of buildings apparently designed without any thought of the site, served merely to aggravate and underline the utter lack of esthetic cooperation on the part of the architects. The design of the individual buildings was, of course, no worse than at Paris, in 1925, and some of the foreign pavilions as well as a few by American architects were in themselves of considerable excellence. The minor constructions of the anonymous architectural staff of the Fair were, in fact, almost comparable to Asplund's work in their simplicity and elegance.

In considering the architectural possibilities of a New York Exposition in 1939, it is evident that there will be ample opportunity to profit by the mistakes as well as by the achievements of earlier Fairs.

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HENRY-RUSSELL HITCHCOCK, JR.

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## Acknowledgments

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ERNESTINE M. FANTL, *Curator*

## Modern Exposition Architecture

This exhibition of Modern Exposition Architecture is intended briefly to show the success with which the modern idiom has been expressed in Fair architecture and the flexibility with which it lends itself to various uses. Emphasis has been placed on unity of design and coherence of planning rather than on social implication. The Stockholm Exposition makes explicit what becomes apparent in a study of these expositions: that a Fair planned with a strong central theme, one related to man's needs in modern civilization, will probably result in a Fair logically planned, homogeneous in style and of contemporary value. It is necessary to add that the theme should be carried out. Most expositions have been dignified with impressive theses but have actually produced a confusion of heterogeneous architecture and haphazard planning.

- 1. Stockholm Exposition, Sweden, 1930. E. Gunnar Asplund, chief architect**  
Musical Instrument Pavilion  
Panoramic view  
Decorative Arts Pavilion  
Main entrance and exhibition offices  
Glass and Linoleum Pavilions. Swen Markelius, architect  
Night view  
Plan of Exposition
- 2. Werkbund Exhibition, Cologne, Germany, 1914**  
Factory and Office of Deutzer Gasoline Engine Works. Walter Gropius and Adolf Meyer, architects
- 3. Exposition of Decorative Arts, Paris, France, 1925**  
Pavillon de L'Esprit Nouveau. Le Corbusier, architect
- 4. Pressa (World Press Exposition), Cologne, Germany, 1928**  
Municipalities Pavilion  
ADGB Pavilion. Hans Schumacher, architect
- 5. Brno Exposition, Czechoslovakia, 1928**  
Pavilion of the City of Brno. Bohuslav Fuchs, architect

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6. **Barcelona Exposition, Spain, 1929**  
German Pavilion. Miës van der Rohe, architect  
Plan of Exposition
7. **Antwerp Exposition, Belgium, 1930**  
Finnish Pavilion. Erik Bryggman, architect
8. **Arts and Crafts Exposition, Vienna, Austria, 1930**  
Tourist Pavilion. Oswald Haerdtl, architect
9. **Building Exposition, Berlin, Germany, 1931**  
View of Exposition. Miës van der Rohe, architect  
Installation. Miës van der Rohe and Lilly Reich, designers
10. **A Century of Progress, Chicago, 1933.**  
Panoramic View  
Plan  
Entrance Gateway. Staff architects  
Chrysler Building. Holabird and Root, designers  
Avenue of Flags. Joseph Urban, designer
11. **Fifth Triennial Exposition of Modern Decorative and Industrial Arts and Architecture, Milan, Italy, 1933**  
Plaza of Honor. Mario Sironi, designer  
Press Pavilion. Luciano Baldessari, architect  
Air view and plan
12. **Brussels Exposition, Belgium, 1935**  
Swedish Pavilion  
Czechoslovakian Pavilion
13. **Texas Centennial Exposition, Dallas, June, 1936**  
Pavilion for the Magnolia Petroleum Company. William E. Lecaze, architect  
Air view of layout
14. **Paris Exposition, 1937**  
Trocadéro remodelled. Carlu, Boileau, Azéma, architects  
Press Pavilion. Viret & Marmoret, architects  
General plan. Letrosne, Greber, Matzloff, architects; Crevel, director

## **The Museum of Modern Art: an International Broadcast**

Miss Margaret Scolari, representing The Museum of Modern Art, will radiocast over the short waves an address on "International Good Will in Art" from the studio of the World Wide Broadcasting Foundation in Boston over Station W1XAL on Sunday, February 16, at 5:15 p.m. As W1XAL is a short-wave international transmitting station with a large audience in Europe, Miss Scolari will speak in English, French and Italian. Radio dials in this country and abroad should be turned to 640 megacycles on the short wave.

## **Election of Trustee**

At a meeting of the Board of Trustees, held on January 23rd, 1936, Mr. Beardsley Ruml was elected a trustee to the class of 1938.

## **Election of Officers**

At the same meeting of the Board the following officers were elected for 1936: President: Mr. A. Conger Goodyear; First Vice-President: Mr. Nelson A. Rockefeller; Second Vice-President: Mrs. John S. Sheppard; Treasurer: Mr. Samuel A. Lewisohn; Secretary: Mr. Thomas Dabney Mabry, Jr.

## **World's Fair Exhibition**

In view of the general interest in expositions, stimulated by the proposed World's Fair to be held in New York in 1939, the Museum of Modern Art is planning for the spring an exhibition of material which illustrates the achievements of former Fairs.

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