

Modern art in your life

By Robert Goldwater, in collaboration with René
d'Harnoncourt

Author

Goldwater, Robert, 1907-1973

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from our founding in 1929 to the present—is
available online. It includes exhibition catalogues,
primary documents, installation views, and an
index of participating artists.

The Museum of Modern Art

Modern Art in Your Life



Paul Rand

The Museum of Modern Art Library

(3rd Edition)

In celebration of its 20th anniversary in 1949, the Museum of Modern Art presented two exhibitions, one called *Timeless Aspects of Modern Art*, the other *Modern Art in Your Life*. The first of these dealt with the relationship between modern art and the art of past periods, and was designed to show that modern art is not an isolated phenomenon in history, but an integral part of the art of all ages. The ideas developed in this exhibition were incorporated in the portfolio *Modern Art Old and New*, published by the Museum in 1950.

The second exhibition, *Modern Art in Your Life*, on which this publication is based, was designed to show that the appearance and shape of countless objects of our everyday environment are related to, or derived from, modern painting and sculpture, and that modern art is an intrinsic part of modern living.

These exhibitions and publications were not prepared as justifications of the artistic merit of modern art. Works of art need no justification beyond their own appeal. The aim of this special series is to demonstrate, persistent doubters to the contrary, that modern art, like the art of any period, is both rooted in tradition and truly pertinent to its own time.

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Modern Art in Your Life

By Robert Goldwater In Collaboration with René d'Harnoncourt

The Museum of Modern Art, New York

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R. d'H. and R. G.

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Introduction

Modern art plays an important part in shaping the world we live in. Sensitive to the conditions of the modern world, it has transformed and remade much of the outward appearance of familiar scenes. Whether we are aware of it or not (and whether we like it or not), it helps to produce the environment of our daily lives.

As the artist's concepts are molded by the trends and aspirations of his age, so in turn he molds the appearance of objects around him. The role of a machine civilization in fathering Mondrian's love of the right angle and the clean, flat surface may be argued, but there is no doubt that his work gives form to the passionate concern with mathematical order that made mechanization possible and that the esthetic of his pictures has entered into our way of seeing the world. When the architect strips his walls of ornament, when the jacket designer makes up his page with a few rigorous lines against large immaculate areas, when the package designer limits his appeal to square-cut letters and a minimum of balanced rectangles, they all share Mondrian's delight in a bold and subtle simplicity. In like fashion, the advertising artist, silhouetting his product against a dramatic deep and empty space, accepts the surrealist vision, while the furniture designer bends his plywood into freely molded shapes that have their counterpart in the works of *Arp* and *Miro*.

These similarities suggest that the artist has given form to a vision which the designer then makes his own; and indeed the designer often frankly follows after the artist, adapting to his own uses the latter's invention and discovery. (This is especially true when the artist is on occasion also a designer.) But as often these resemblances connote a common point of view

adopted independently by artist, architect and designer alike—similar needs provoking similar esthetic discoveries—and it is incorrect to speak of source and derivation. But however they may arise, the forms of modern art are part of modern living.

This directly contradicts the point of view that the modern artist is isolated from the rest of the world, and his work therefore without meaning for his fellow men. Many people who are critical of modern art accept its parallels and offshoots in the field of design with familiar, even friendly, unconcern. They readily admire the sensitive balance in a fine example of contemporary typography, or the magic mood of a display window, without realizing that in them they pay tribute to the vision and achievement of the artist. They are still self-conscious when they approach modern art even though they are on easy terms with everyday modern designs and readily accept them as reflections of the twentieth century.

For the older periods of the world's art we take this pervasive unity for granted. We assume a natural relation between the Greek vase and the Greek temple. We enjoy the similarities among the Gothic cathedral, sculpture, tapestry and chest. We admire the unity in the architecture, pewter ware and portraits of a New England house. Belonging to the same world, we expect them to have certain essential likenesses; the same spirit infuses them all, creations of the artist, artisan, or designer, and as we recognize it we call it the "style" of the time.

Such similarities are aids to insight. By comparison and contrast we see with greater precision and enjoy with deeper understanding. But

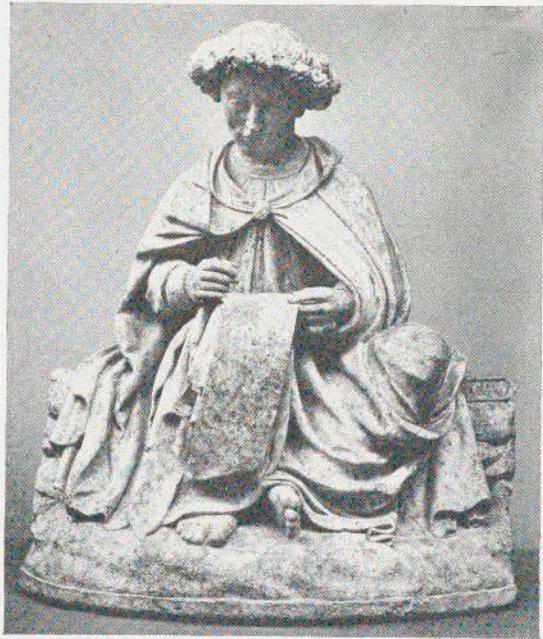
no one would for an instant suppose that the pottery is needed to justify the picture, the furniture to excuse the architecture, nor that the inspiration of the artist exists merely to jog the inventive powers of the designer.

Now, as in the past, the work of art is its own reason for being. In the common phrase, it is a good in itself. As a distillation of vision and imagination, as a summation of experience, it effectively changes our way of seeing things. And since the designer, being similarly concerned with the organization of visual forms and symbols, is sensitive to this power within the work, it is only natural that he should be the first to come under its influence and share in its inspiration.

But, paradoxically, were the painter or sculptor to think beyond his art to this practical effect he would forfeit the image-making power that gives him his hold upon the minds of others. Only by striving for the greatest consistency and expressiveness on his own terms as an artist can he achieve the highly charged concentrate of the work of art. If he relaxes his vigilance, the intensity is gone; and if he considers application, use and fitness beyond his immediate esthetic concern he defeats his own purpose.

Nor are these instances of parallels, influences or affinities with the various useful arts intended as an apology—for modern art needs no utilitarian justification. They are simply a selected demonstration that, in fact, modern art has been a source and a catalyst for much of our everyday environment.

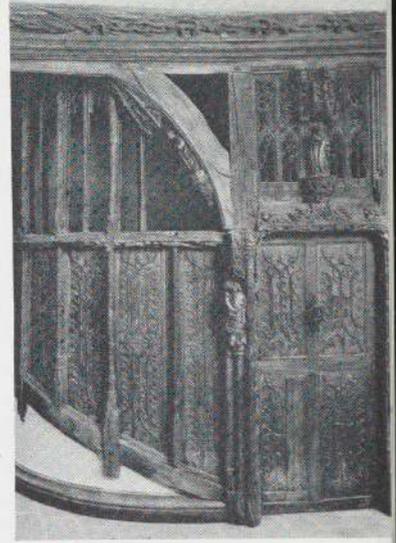
One of the characteristics of modern art is its diversity. Not *all* styles of art, much less all individual artists, have directly affected the practice of the designer. Whole schools and many important and representative masters have been without such stylistic connections. Their work, nevertheless, has its effect on our view of the world, as when a Picasso or a Beckmann creates symbols of content and meaning that compress wide sums of significant experience but have



A Saint Writing. French. Late XIV or early XV century. The Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York

little bearing on the designer's purpose. In other cases the effect of an artist's works may permeate our world in ways too gradual and subtle for specific illustration: a Matisse, successfully employing new hues and harmonies, has increased our sensitivity to the range and nuance of color; a Chagall has made us willing to accept a new type of fantasy; a de Chirico has given us a new sense of the mysterious beneath the commonplace. In the long run such changes, although they are difficult to pin down, affect the designer just as they enlarge the esthetic experience of us all.

The styles of modern art are not reflected equally in all kinds of applied design. There are natural affinities of technique and mood that make a particular style more adaptable to one field than another. The sudden shock of surrealism's dream world is wonderfully suited to the show window, the stage set, and the more ephemeral sort of advertisement. The clear-cut, clearly



left: Alexander the Great. Detail from one of the nine Heroes Tapestries. French, about 1385. The Cloisters, The Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York, *center:* Oak chair. French, late XV or early XVI century. The Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York. *right:* Detail, carved oak woodwork from Abbeville. French, early XVI century. The Cloisters, The Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York

bounded, carefully balanced areas of geometric abstract art seem naturally related to architecture and furniture, book design and packaging. We see at once how Léger's bold simplifications and bright colors, LeCorbusier's smooth volumes, can be extended to the large surfaces of the poster.

But we should not assume that each field of design closely parallels a specific school of painting. Technique and function are not the sole determinants of even the most directly useful objects. Their style is also subject to taste. Thus some kinds of furniture reflect a love of the right angle similar to Mondrian's, while others employ shapes closer to the free forms of Miro and Arp or a combination of both styles. We should also beware of looking for derivations of a specific applied design from specific works of art.

The relation between styles of art and types of design is general rather than particular. Even where direct influence exists—for instance, when a designer works at will in a variety of manners so that we know he has studied them all—it stems from a whole tendency and style rather than from individual works. In fact, very often the style has reached the designer only through a series of intermediaries and he is unacquainted with the works of art which also embody the principles of form upon which he is organizing his material. This is the more widespread and the more significant influence: the attraction exerted by whole schools and styles upon the appearance of familiar, everyday things.

This attraction does not guarantee quality. The designer working in the modern vein does not for that reason alone produce a result worthy

1920 vs. 1944:

upper left: Linoleums. Page 601, Montgomery Ward Catalogue, 1920

upper right: Armstrong linoleums. Page 545, Montgomery Ward catalogue, 1944

lower left: Miscellaneous tools, Page 735, Montgomery Ward Catalogue, 1920

lower right: Miscellaneous tools. Page 699D. Montgomery Ward Catalogue, 1944

of his source. But the pervasive power of modern art is nowhere shown so well as in the way its forms turn up in designs that are mediocre, if not worse.

Nevertheless, we may believe that the modern designer stands a greater chance of success than his more conventional colleague because he is more vital and contemporary. Even his failure is more interesting than a copy of the past, and his best works are creative contributions to modern life.

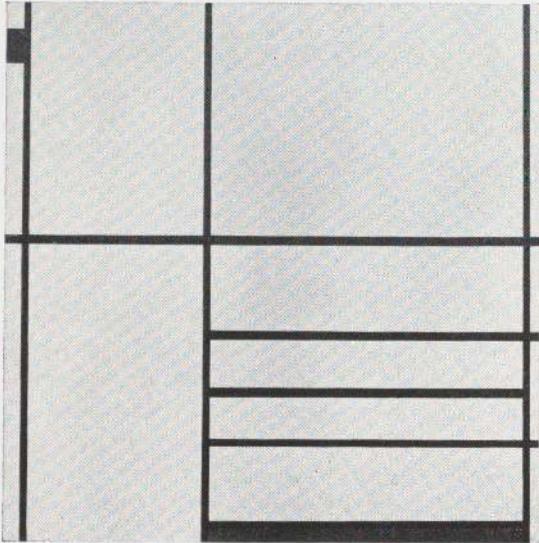
This survey does not attempt to be exhaustive; it must permit typical works to stand for all the relevant aspects of modern painting and sculpture. It can do no more than include characteristic examples of the countless objects of utilitarian design conceived in a contemporary spirit, arranging them not by the time and place of their making but according to their esthetic kinship.

Through thus consciously associating the "pure" art and the "applied" without minimizing the independent existence of either, some of the strangeness of the former may wear off. We may more readily take for granted that the vision of the modern artist, wherever and in whatever form it is found, is an integral and consistent force of our time.

Tubes of Colgate's Dental Cream. *left:* 1925; *right:* 1949



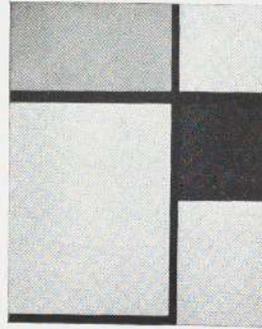
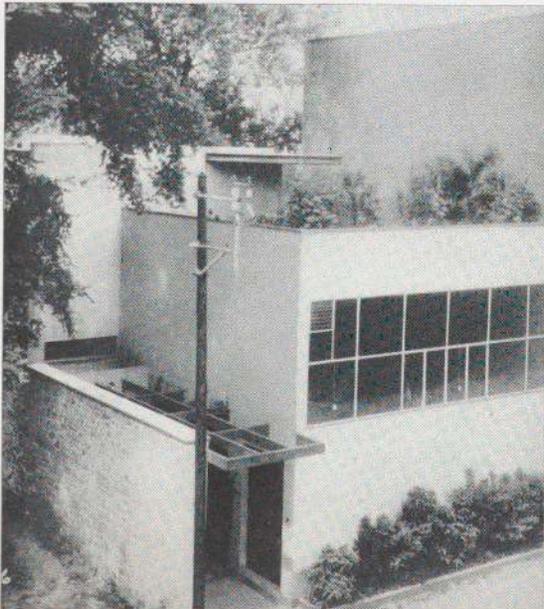
Abstract Geometric Form



MONDRIAN: *Composition in White, Black and Red*. 1936. Oil on canvas, 40 $\frac{1}{4}$ x 41". Museum of Modern Art, gift of the Advisory Committee

The following pages illustrate a wide variety of designs alike in their use of strict geometric form and asymmetrical balance. They are alike too in their severe limitation of elements used to create a design.

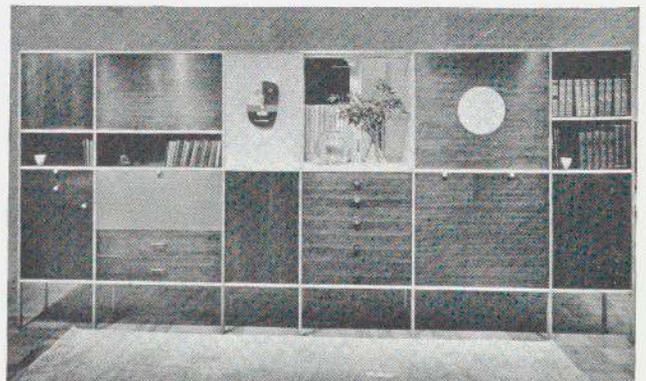
LURCAT: House of Mme. Froriep de Salis. Boulogne-sur-Seine, France. 1927

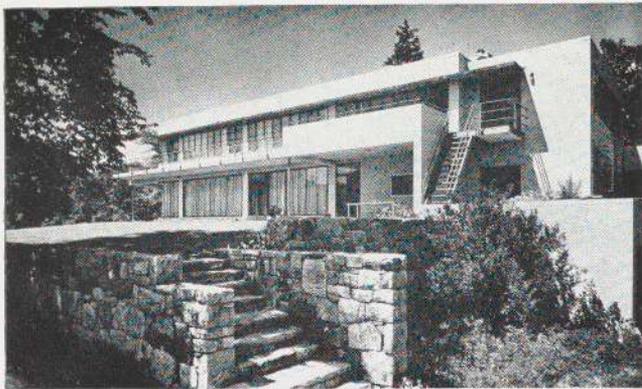


MONDRIAN: *Composition*. 1925. Oil on canvas, 15 $\frac{7}{8}$ x 12 $\frac{5}{8}$ ". Museum of Modern Art, gift of Philip C. Johnson

The objects shown together on pages 10 to 13 impose the severest restraint. They take pleasure in the straight line and the right angle, and avoid the curve. They all employ large smooth rectangles, each of which is of a uniform intensity without shading or modeling. These rectangular areas are at once divided and united by narrower bands. At one extreme (the house by Lurçat and the storage wall by Nelson), these bands approach simple contour lines; at the other (the façade by Doering, cover for *Technique Graphique*), the bands widen to become indistinguishable from the areas they divide. But the line is never merely a boundary, for it always

NELSON: Storage wall unit for The Herman Miller Furniture Company, Zeeland, Michigan. 1949



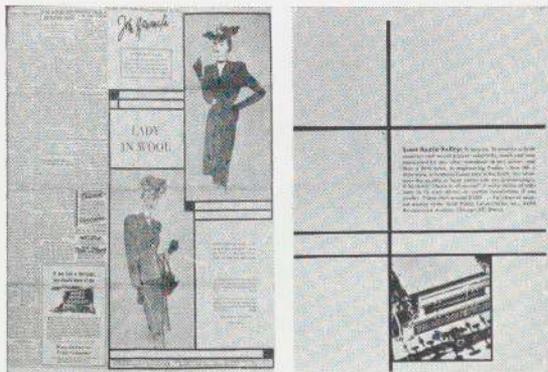


DOERING: House in Greenburgh, New York. 1938

fixes a plane in depth and is located at a precise distance in space from the other rectangles of the composition. The similarity with one or the other of Mondrian's two paintings at the top of the opposite page is apparent.

Throughout these designs there is an even, over-all distribution of emphasis. As in the paintings, outlying edges count as much as the center. In the architecture centralized doorways given importance by increased richness of surface or ornament are avoided, but doors, windows and open entrances become integral parts of a composition of smooth, rectangular surfaces. In covers and packages, lettering, rather than being

Advertisements for John Wanamaker, New York, and Scott Radio Laboratories, Inc., Chicago. 1945

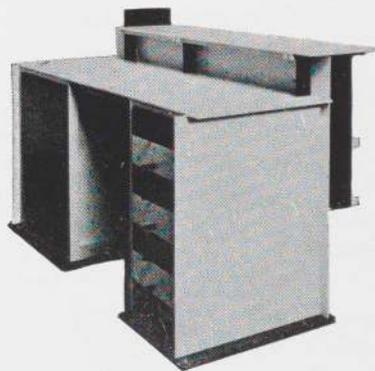


11 *Abstract Geometric Form*



Cover design for *La Technique Graphique*. Paris. 1934

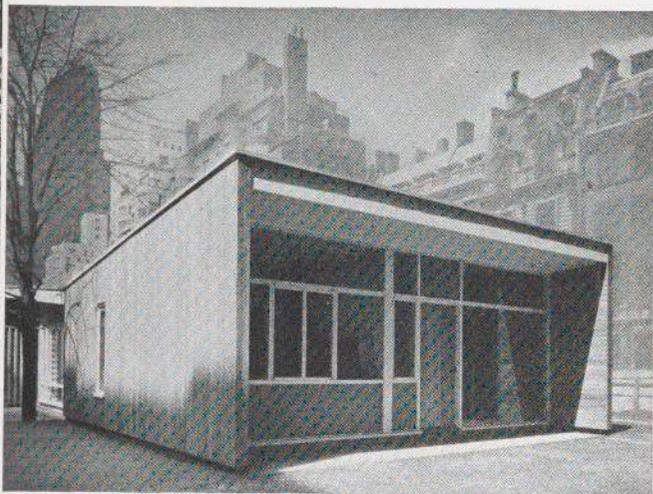
OLSON: Cleansing tissue package for International Cellulose Products Company, Chicago



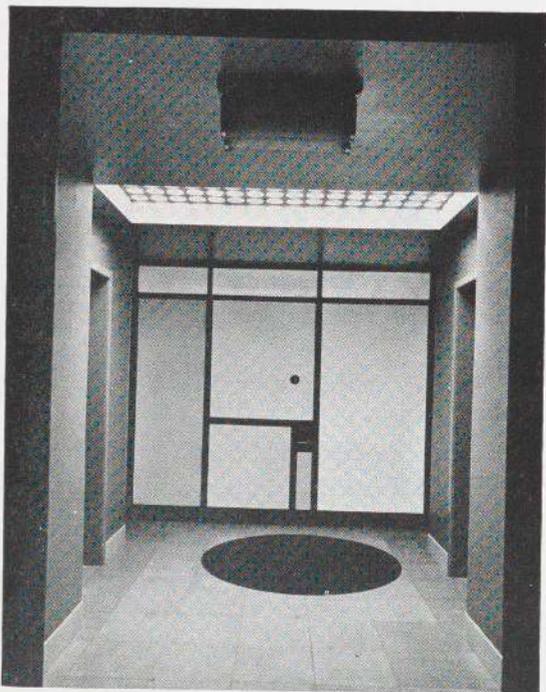
BREUER: Desk. Bauhaus, Dessau. 1924

prominently centered against a subdued background design, as it might have been formerly, is employed simply as one of the elements of the design, and its shape, coloring and position away from the center change with the requirements of composition. As the architect makes ornament of his surface divisions, rather than applying ornament to them, so the designer uses block lettering in character with his ideal of severity.

Technical considerations undoubtedly play an important part in producing these results. Steel and glass and concrete impose certain requirements of handling; the technical possibilities of metal tubing, or the mechanical letter press, give rise to new shapes and arrangements. But these



BREUER: Exhibition house. The Museum of Modern Art, New York. 1949



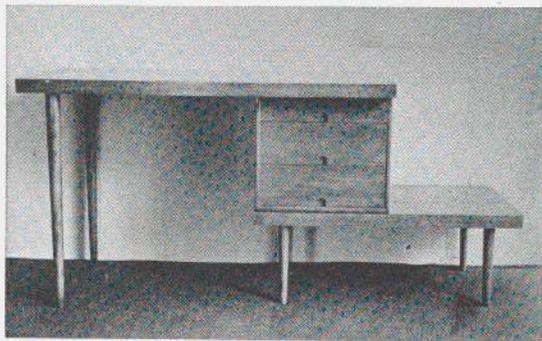
HAESLER: Lobby of private residence. Celle, Germany. 1928

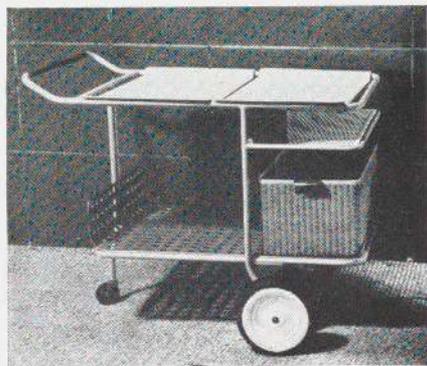
SAARINEN and EAMES: Desk. 1941



BREUER: Chair for Thonet Brothers, Inc. 1928

results are not invariable: metal tubing need not be bent in right angles; plots of land on a city block need not be assembled in narrow slabs, and zoning laws can be met in many ways; presses print dull colors as easily as bright, and varied letters as well as uniform. One has only to compare the banded divisions of the lobby designed by Haesler and the side of the Illinois Institute of Technology building; the diagonal balance of the top of the Philadelphia Savings Fund Society skyscraper and the Kleenex container; the stripes of the end of the house by Breuer and the Nelson storage wall; the progressively recessed slabs of the Muschenheim interior





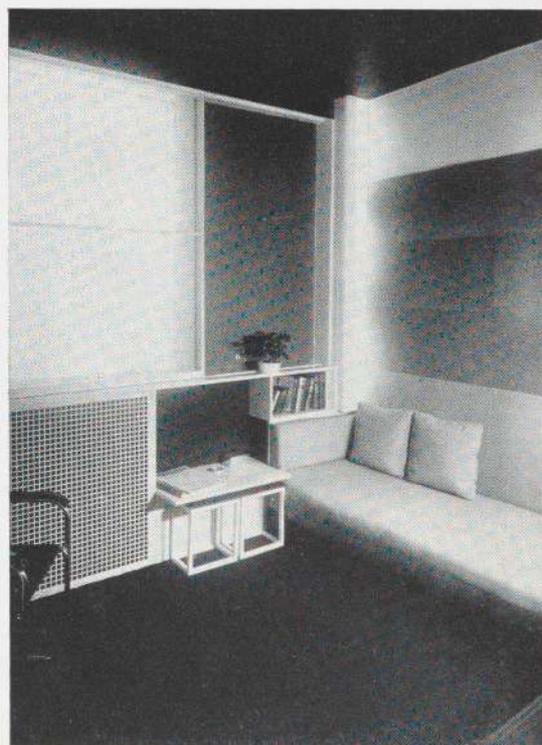
WEESE and BALDWIN: Tea wagon. Lloyd Manufacturing company. 1941



RIETVELD: House. Skeleton construction. Utrecht, Holland. 1928

and those of the Daily News and RCA buildings, and all of them with Mondrian's two canvases, to realize that here is the expression of a common esthetic.

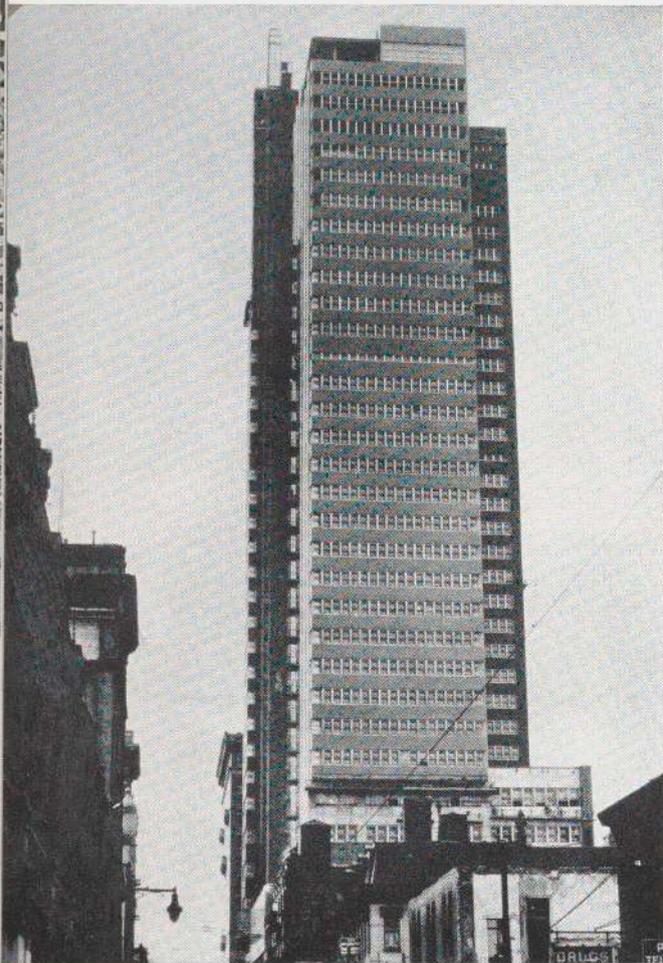
As these examples show, its distribution is wide, in both time and place. Clearly the Dutch architect, Rietveld, was aware of specific details of paintings by artists with whom he was associated. But the same ideal is equally, if more generally, expressed in examples like the Saarinen and Eames desk, that have no such direct connection; while the detailed parallels reappear strikingly (and perhaps consciously) in the recent storage wall.



MUSCHENHEIM: Immo Gulden apartment, New York. 1934



left: MOHOLY-NAGY: Title page. *Neue Arbeiten der Bauhaus Werkstätten*. Dessau. 1925. Museum of Modern Art, Graphic Design Collection



HOWE and LESCAZES: Philadelphia Savings Fund Society Building, Philadelphia, Pennsylvania. 1932

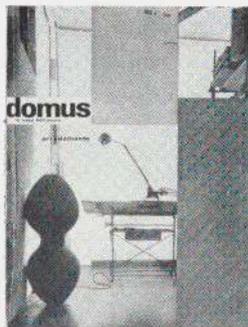


HOOD and HOWELLS: Daily News Building, New York. 1930

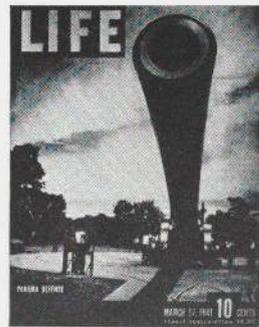
left: PAPADAKI: Cover design for *Progressive Architecture*, July 1949, New York

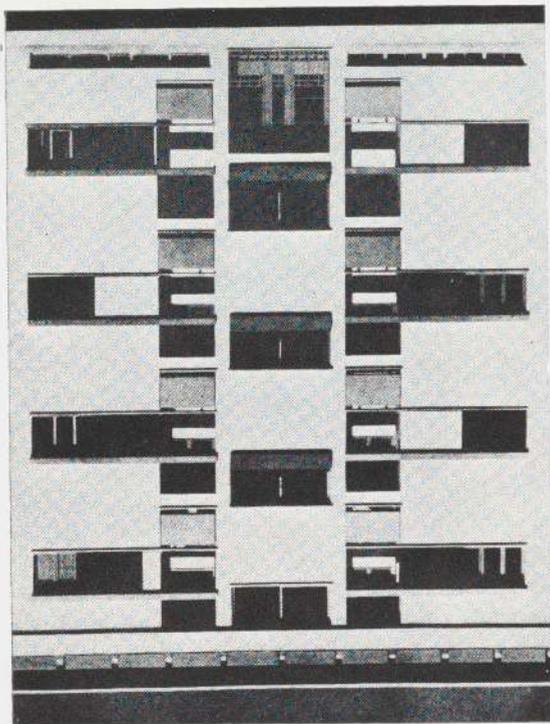


center: cover design for *Domus*, May 1947, Milan



right: Cover design for *Life*, March 17, 1941, New York





LINGERI, DELFINO and TERZAGHI: Detail from apartment house. Milan. 1944

The simplicity and clarity of this style, its clear outlines and smooth surfaces, the self-contained repose of its balanced asymmetry, above all its conscious restraint and self-imposed severity, can earn for it the name of a modern classicism.

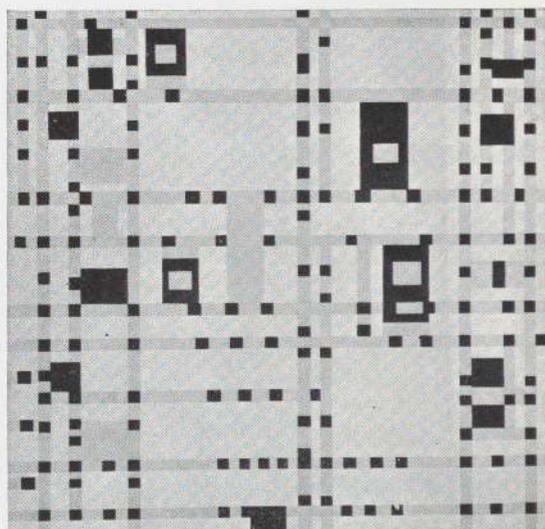
The architecture of skyscrapers is generally thought of as determined entirely by use and construction. But both the examples opposite make prominent use of asymmetrically arranged rectangles in receding planes.

Three magazine covers show variations of the same basic principles of severe angular and asymmetrical design.

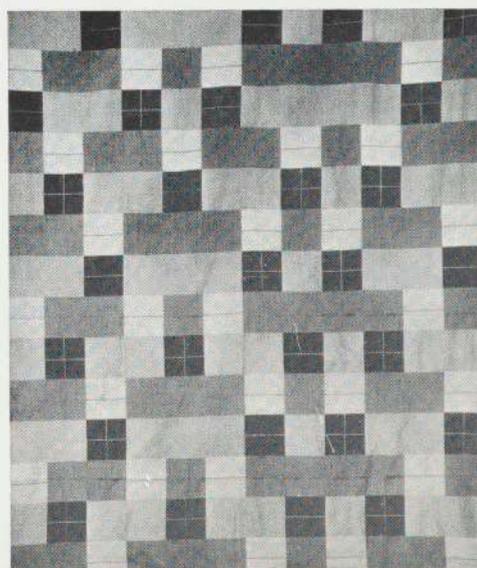
ANNI ALBERS: Silk tapestry. Bauhaus, Dessau. 1927

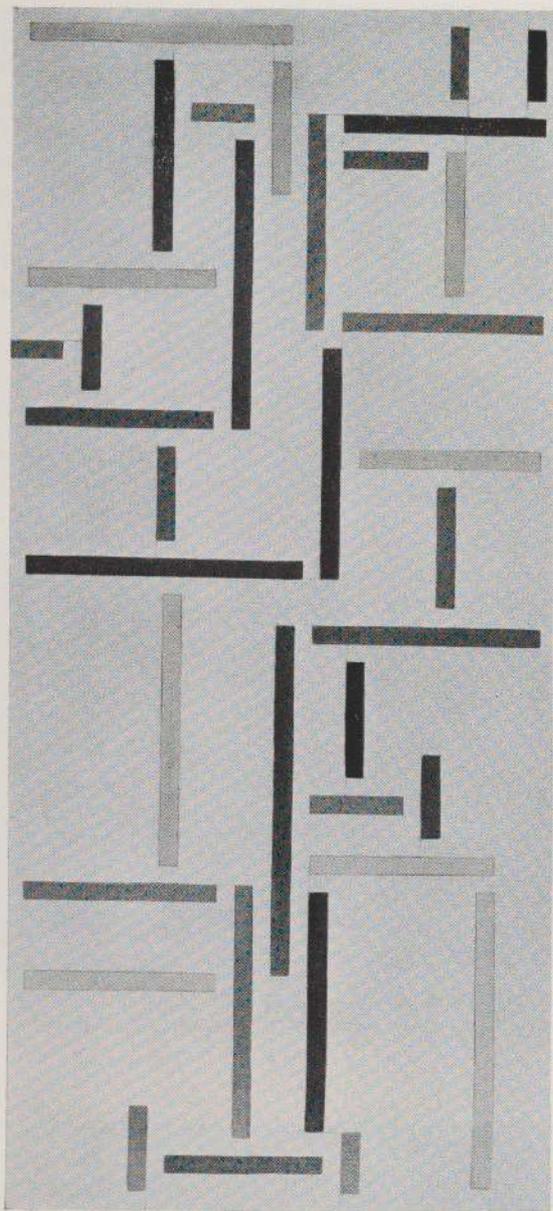
15 *Abstract Geometric Form*

Like the Boogie Woogie, the related façade and textile are composed from the straight line and right angle alone, as in the previous examples. But now the rectangular units they make up are smaller and more numerous, and their position given by a more varied, though no less precise, sequence and system of coordinates. The result is a pulsating design, apparent freedom really rigidly determined.



MONDRIAN: Broadway Boogie Woogie. 1942-43. Oil on canvas, 50 x 50". Museum of Modern Art





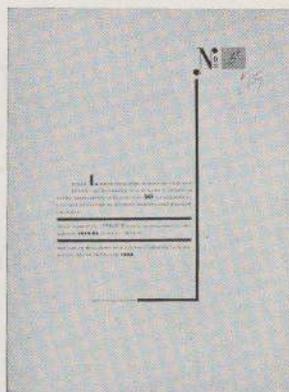
VAN DOESBURG: Rhythm of a Russian Dance. 1918. Oil on canvas, 53½ x 24¼". Museum of Modern Art, acquired through the Lillie P. Bliss Bequest

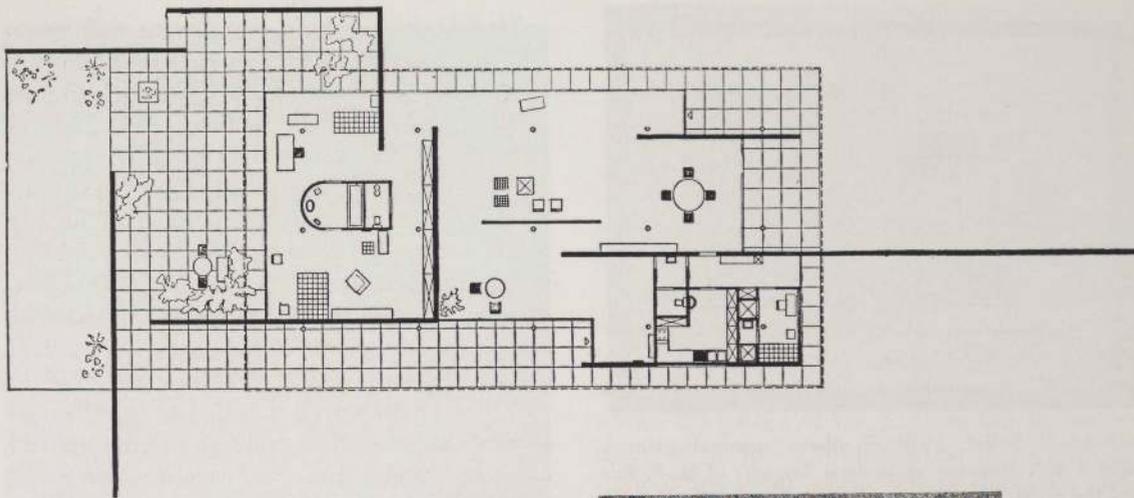
right: LISSITZKY: Title page. *Erste Kestnermappe, Proun* series. Hanover. 1923. Museum of Modern Art, Graphic Design Collection



BREUER: Chair. Bauhaus, Dessau. 1922

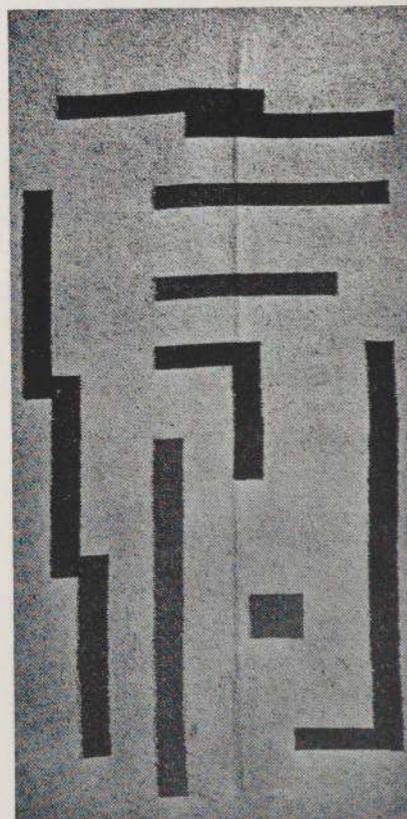
Although these instances of the geometrical ideal are still built of only the same few elements, the structural framework is relaxed, and more present by suggestion than actual statement. Verticals and horizontals are now limited to separated narrow rectangles and set with precision-gauged intervals and sizes against space. This space is now free, not confined in discrete units, and its over-all unity is heightened rather than diminished by the colored bands which punctuate but only momentarily interrupt its free flow.



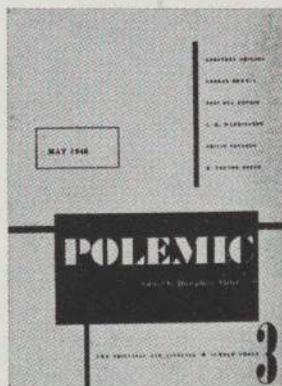


MIES VAN DER ROHE: Floor plan of house. Berlin. 1931

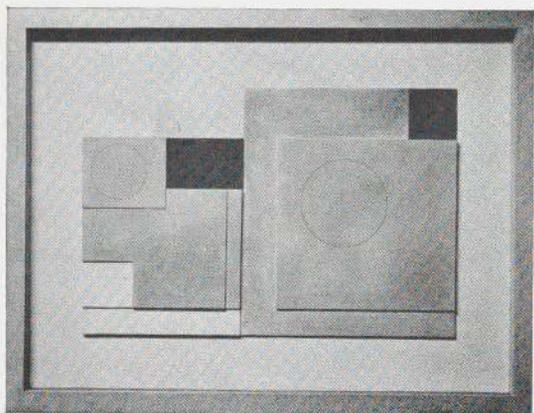
The result is a design less stern and forceful than the early Mondrian, but of an extreme elegance and refinement. This sense of continuous space flowing around partitions which measure rather than enclose it, is one of the fundamental ideas to which the modern architect holds in designing his interiors. Note how this love of open space is shown in Mies van der Rohe's floor plan, which also, simply in the arrangement of its slender divisions, resembles Doesburg's *Rhythm of a Russian Dance*.



MARCHI: Rug for G. Bronzini. Mestre, Italy



left: DEL RENZIO: Cover design for *Polemic*, May 1946. Rodney Phillips & Green Co., Ltd. London



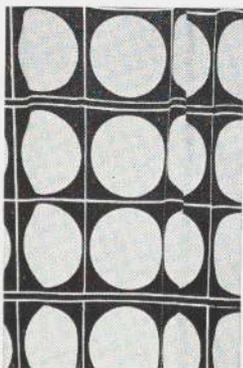
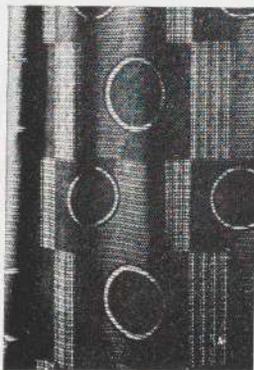
NICHOLSON: Relief. 1939. Synthetic material painted, 32 $\frac{7}{8}$ x 45". Museum of Modern Art, gift of H. S. Eds and the artist



Straight line and right angle are still prominent in the designs on this page, but two new elements are introduced. One is the circle, purest of all curved forms, which though it is now employed in contrast to the rigid line and rectangle, is yet of the same geometrically determined character. It does not disturb the calm of orderly balance, since its movement is in upon itself. The other new element is actual space. Where Mondrian and Doesburg convey position in space by shape of area, width of line, and intensity of color, Nicholson employs actual bas-relief in which planes are stepped back and overlap, and shadows are cast. This translation into physical actuality results in a certain matter-of-factness.

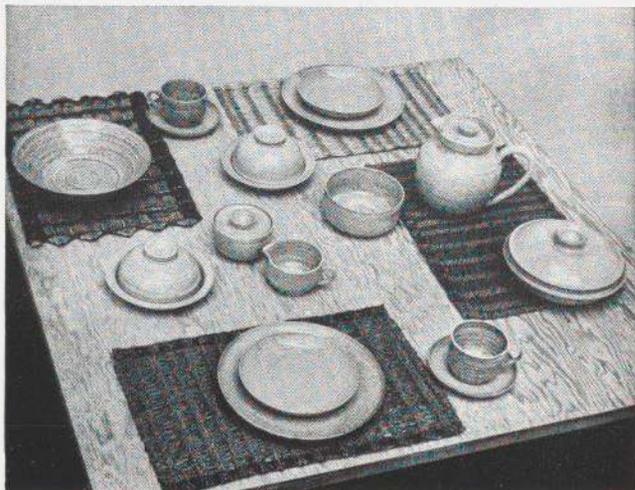
In fabrics this recession is interpreted by an overlapping of lines which establishes a series of planes in the same almost tangible way. In Loewy's radio cabinet, knobs and dials project at varying depths against the asymmetrical balance of the rectangles. Note how these same features occur in the table set for two persons, with

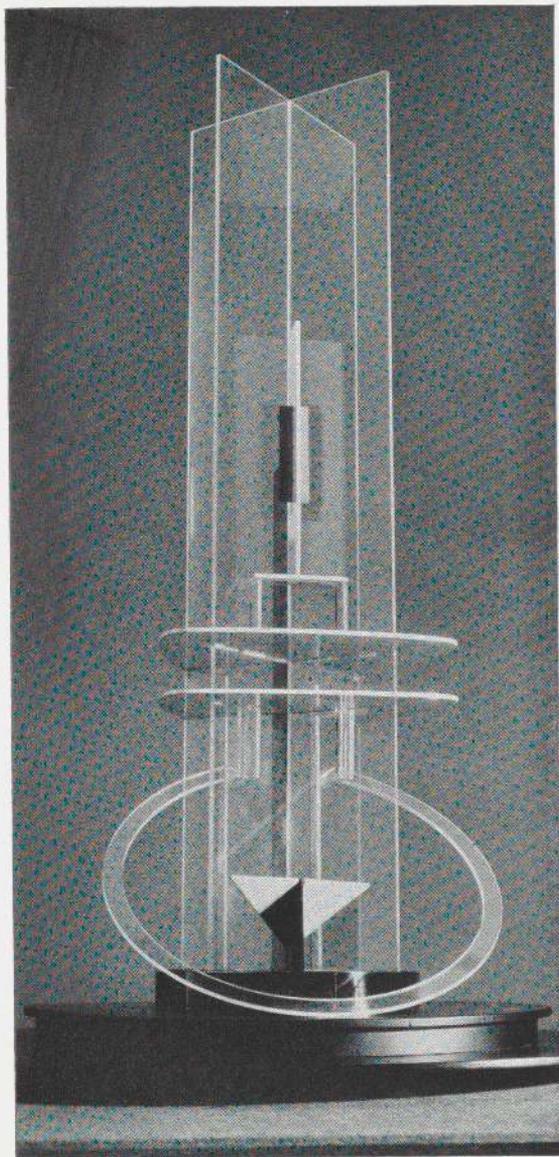
left: LOEWY: Model S 40, communications receiver. The Hallicrafters Company, New York. 1946. Museum of Modern Art, Industrial Design Collection



left: MORTON: Jacquard woven fabric. England. 1946.
right: RAYMOND: Printed textile. Cyrus Clark, distributor. 1941. Museum of Modern Art, Industrial Design Collection

BALL: Geometric arrangement of tableware. 1947



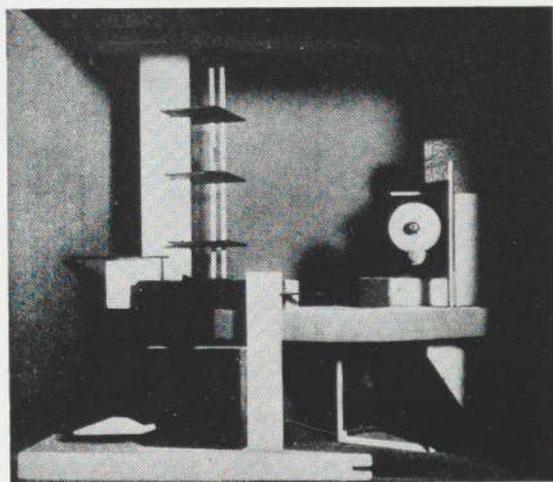


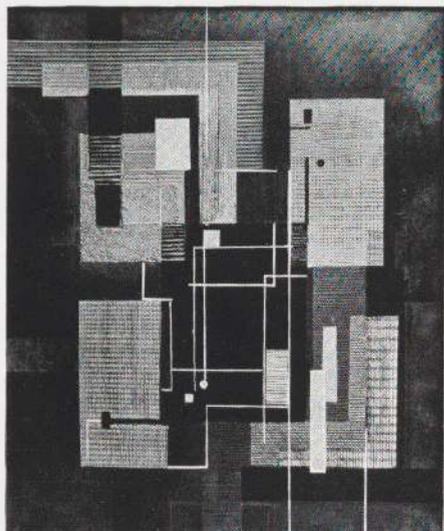
GABO: Column. 1923. Glass, plastic, metal, wood, 41" high. Collection The Phillips Academy, Andover, Massachusetts

FRAMPOLINI: Model for Magnetic Theatre. Italy. Prior to 1925

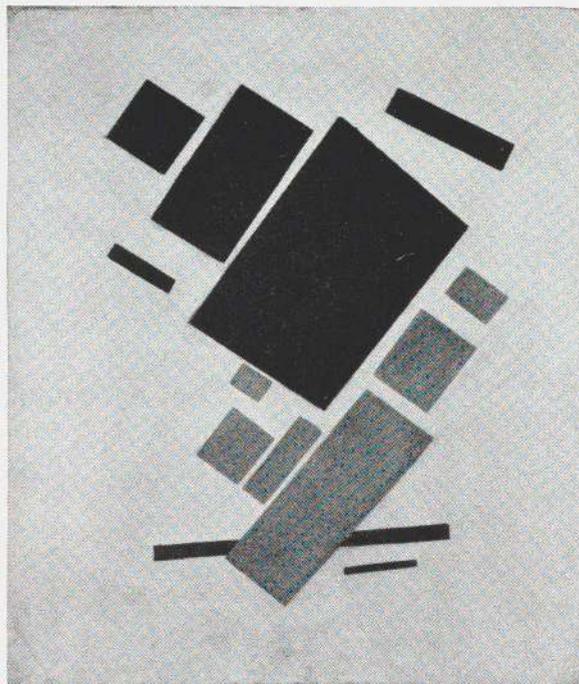
mats and stoneware moved away from any central axis.

With this last group of geometrically abstract works we move into a realm of much greater freedom. In all the preceding works the use of the right angle applied not only to divisions within the planes of the pictures but to the relation of planes to the observer: these were always placed at 90° to his line of sight; his position was as determined as the rest. With Gabo's *Column* he is now free to move, and as he does, the dominant right angle and circle of the plan form and reform into any number of angles and ellipses. Thus an entirely new sense of directional freedom within a three-dimensional space is created, an interpenetration of lines of force, and a dynamic balance. These elements, employed somewhat more statically, are given an immediate application in the stage set by a member of the same milieu.

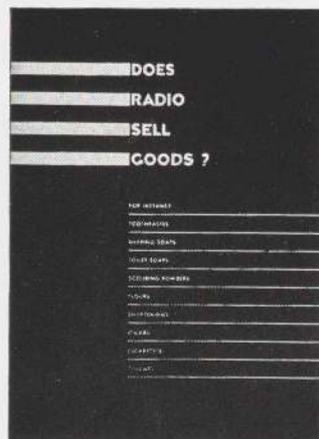




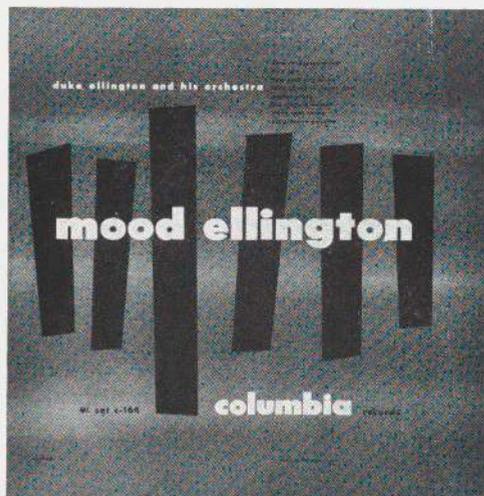
PEREIRA: *White Lines*, 1942. Oil, with various fillers, on vellum, 25 $\frac{7}{8}$ x 21 $\frac{7}{8}$ ". Museum of Modern Art, gift of Edgar Kaufmann, Jr.



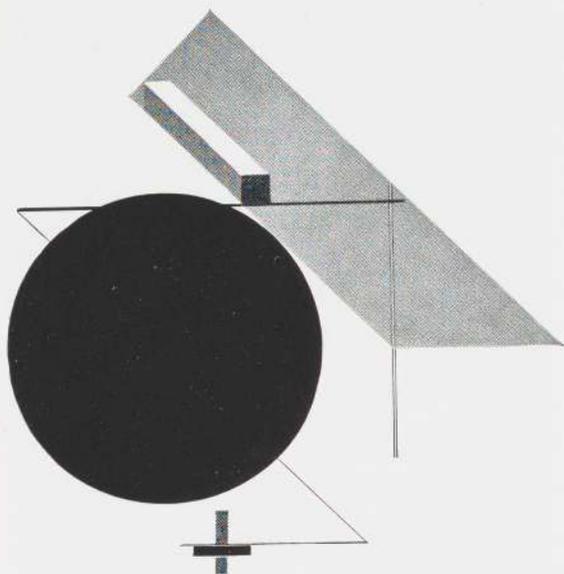
MALEVICH: *Suprematist Composition*. 1914. (After pencil drawing of 1913.) Oil on canvas, 22 $\frac{7}{8}$ x 19". Museum of Modern Art, Purchase Fund



O'BRIEN: Cover design for *Does Radio Sell Goods?*, Columbia Broadcasting System, New York. 1931



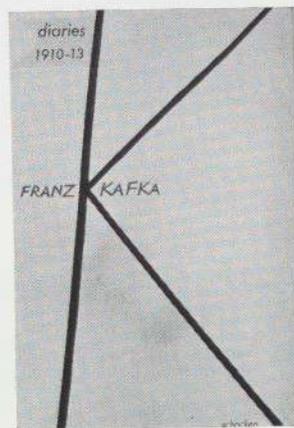
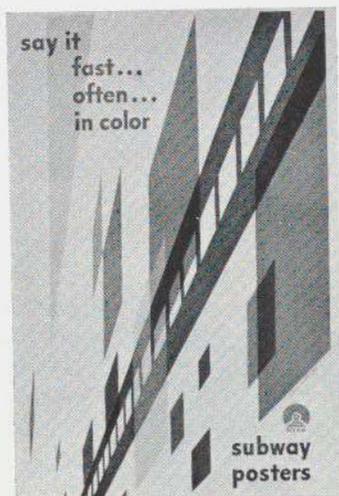
JONES: Album cover for Columbia Records. 1948. Museum of Modern Art, Graphic Design Collection



LISSITZKY: Construction. *Proun*, 1919-23. Lithograph and collage, 23 $\frac{3}{4}$ x 17 $\frac{3}{8}$ ". Museum of Modern Art, Purchase Fund

In the Malevich and the Lissitzky, this freedom now permits the use of the diagonal in composition, and the abandoning of the right angle in the forms composed. It also makes for a suggestion of vector movement with an all enveloping, endless space. Since position no longer exists by virtue of rigid balance, by implication that position can change, and the surrounding openness implies that it will. Thus we move closer to the border line of free form freely situated in deep space.

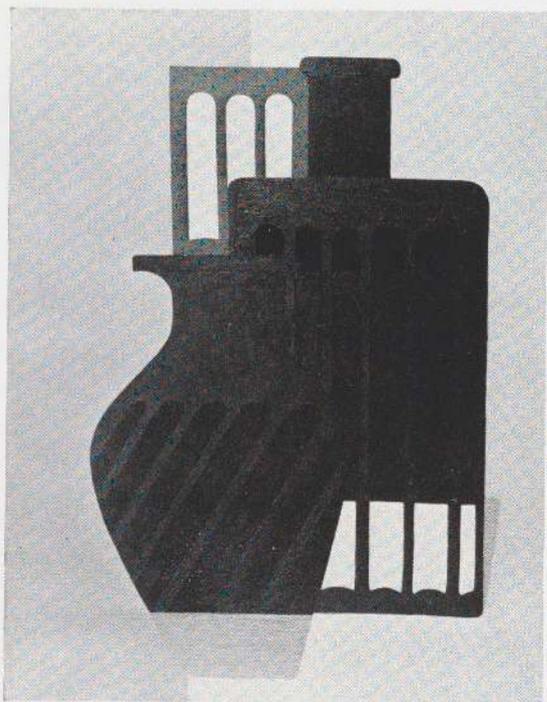
Poster, book cover, and record album all possess these qualities in varying proportions. Their elements are still the sparse few we have noted throughout this whole abstract tendency, but they are placed with such apparent spontaneity that the whole effect is light and open.



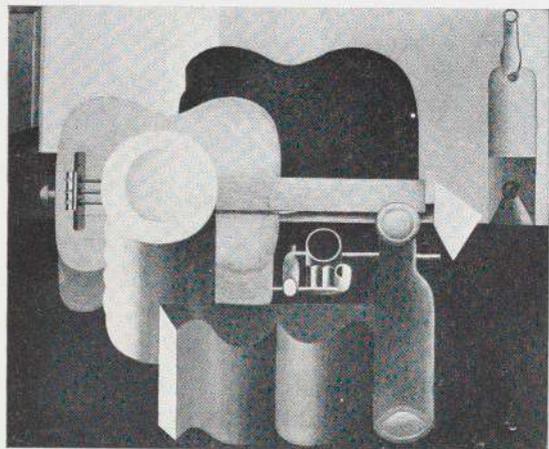
left: GAMES: Poster for The Royal Society for the Prevention of Accidents. London. 1948, right: NITSCHKE: Poster for New York subway. 1917. Both, Museum of Modern Art, Graphic Design Collection

SCHOCKEN and OLDENBURG: Jacket design. Schocken Books, Inc. 1948. Museum of Modern Art, Graphic Design Collection

Geometrically Stylized Representation



OZENFANT: *The Vases*. 1925. Oil on canvas, 51 $\frac{3}{8}$ x 38 $\frac{3}{4}$ ". Museum of Modern Art, acquired through the Lillie P. Bliss Bequest

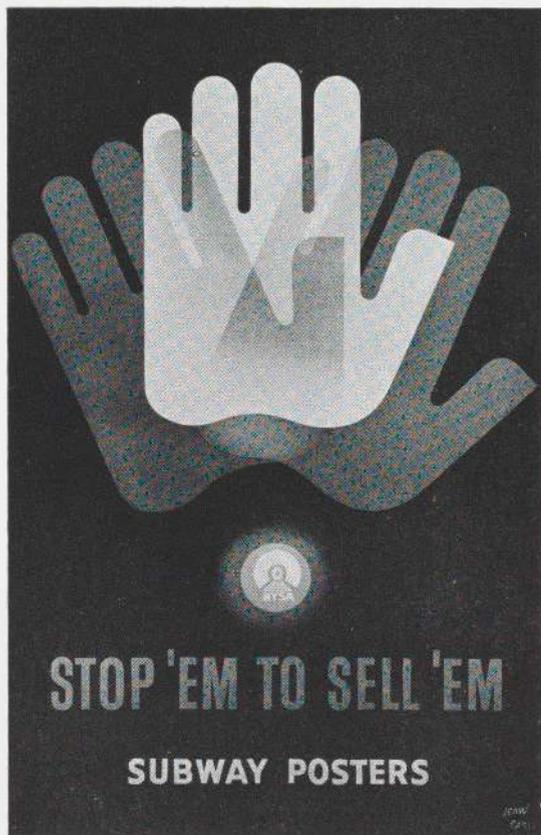


Both the works of art and the applied designs here brought together under one title have this in common: that they combine satisfaction in geometric order with representation. Like geometric abstraction they are attracted by the clean contour and the smooth surface. Strong horizontals and verticals compose into over-all arrangements of a heavy, often massive stability. The desire for representation adds the new element of modeling; but the curved surfaces, like the flat ones, remain smooth, and approximate geometric solids. Geometric order has its clearest physical embodiment in machinery, and in these designs even living things tend to be stylized into regular mechanical shapes.

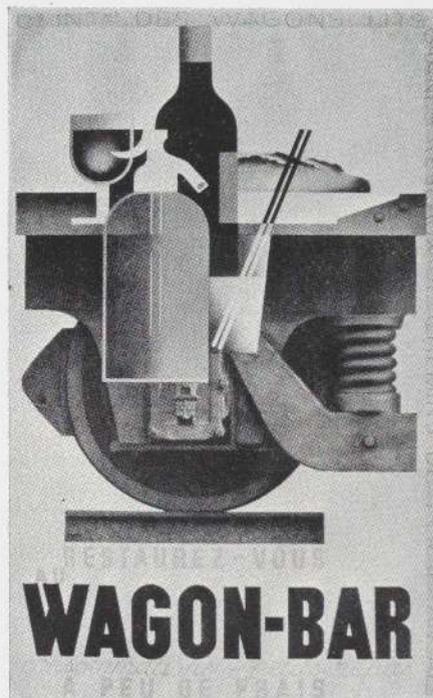
Thus representation takes on a symbolic quality. Elimination of individual accident and detail, emphasis on basic structure, make one object stand for a whole class of objects: not "a" pitcher but the essentials of "the" pitcher. Instead of straight line and plane surface, composition is built of three-dimensional undulating volumes, above all cylinder and sphere. Lighting is dramatic, with sharp contrast sometimes going as far as silhouettes, sometimes producing exaggerated bulkiness; but like the objects it brings into sharp relief, it is a generalized lighting, in which specific source and naturalistic atmospheric effect are eliminated. There may be dramatic isolation of the object (Ozenfant painting) or there may be an arbitrary grouping of details assembled according to the combined dictates of composition and an idea spelled out (Léger painting, Cassandre poster). Theoretically, any relative proportion of geometrical structure to realistic detail is possible, but the regular rhythm of geometric solid and measured interval is never lost.

Hindsight tells us that this is a style ideally suited to the poster. Objects are recognizable,

LE CORBUSIER: *Still Life*. 1920. Oil on canvas, 31 $\frac{7}{8}$ x 39 $\frac{3}{4}$ ". Museum of Modern Art, van Gogh Purchase Fund



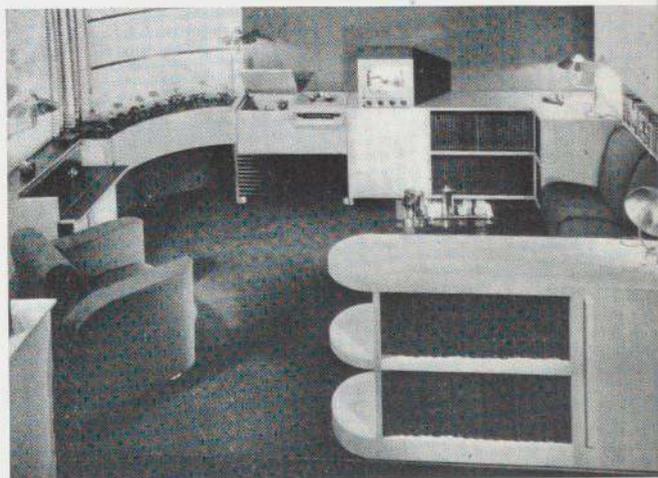
CARLU: New York subway poster. 1947. Museum of Modern Art, Graphic Design Collection

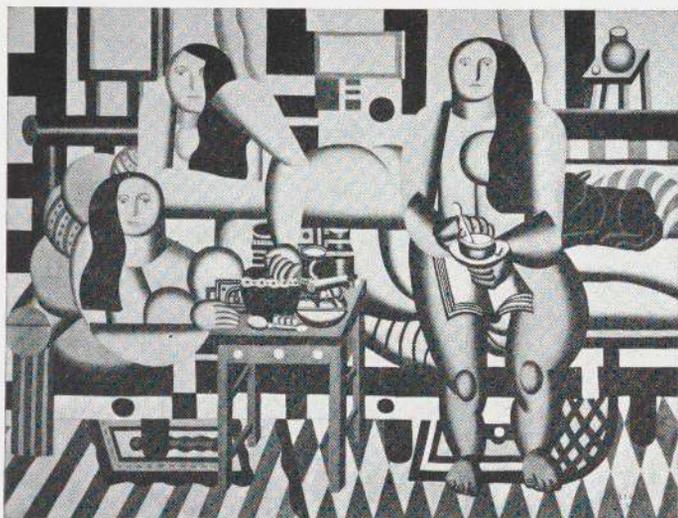


CASSANDRE: Poster for Compagnie Internationale des Wagons Lits. 1932. Museum of Modern Art, Graphic Design Collection

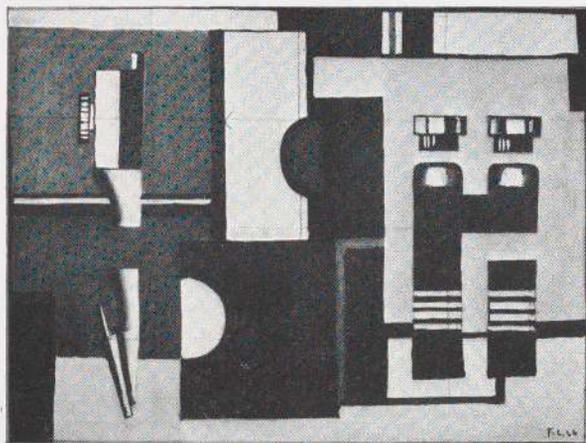
but elimination of detail makes them immediately striking. The parts suggest the whole and may be brought together to tell a story since salient features suggest much more than is shown. The structure of geometric stylization makes for a unified visual impression easily grasped, and strong contrasts catch the attention. In posters such as those of Cassandre, Carlu, McKnight Kauffer, these elements are employed in such an economical, meaningful way that they constitute a modern iconography built of visual symbols whose full impact everyone can understand.

VASSOS: Music room, America at Home. New York World's Fair, 1939





ARCHIPENKO: Woman Combing Her Hair. 1915. Bronze. 13 $\frac{3}{4}$ " high. Museum of Modern Art, acquired through the Lillie P. Bliss Bequest



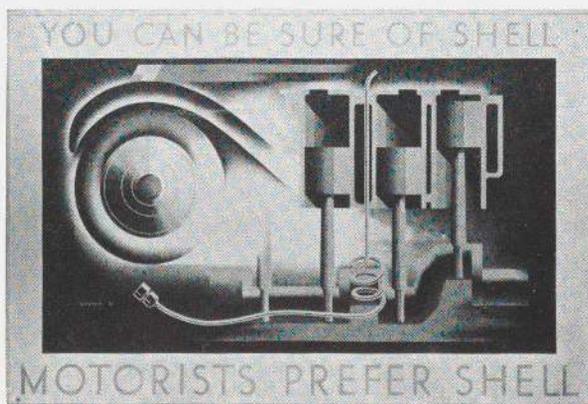
upper left: LÉGER: The Three Women (*Le grand déjeuner*). 1921. Oil on canvas, 72 $\frac{1}{4}$ x 99". Museum of Modern Art, Mrs. Simon Guggenheim Fund

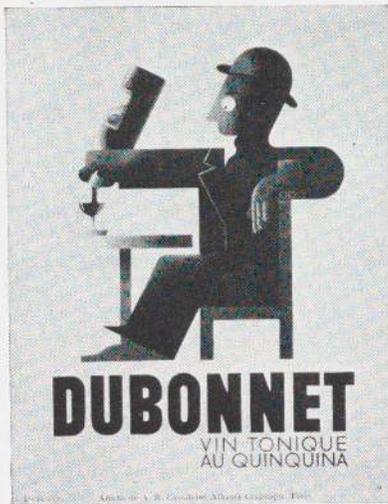


right: Mannequin. Paris. 1929

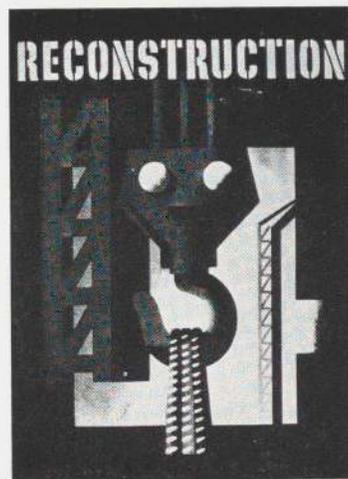
LÉGER: Compass and Paint Tubes. 1926. Gouache, 10 $\frac{1}{2}$ x 14 $\frac{1}{4}$ ". Museum of Modern Art, gift of Edward M. M. Warburg

ANDERSON: Poster for Shell Oil Company, England. 1935. Museum of Modern Art, Graphic Design Collection

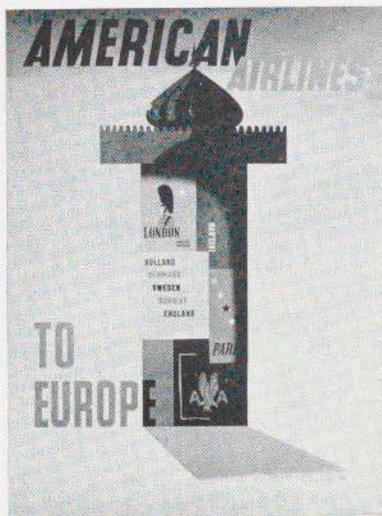




CASSANDRE: Poster for Dubonnet Société Anonyme, Paris. 1932. Museum of Modern Art, Graphic Design Collection.

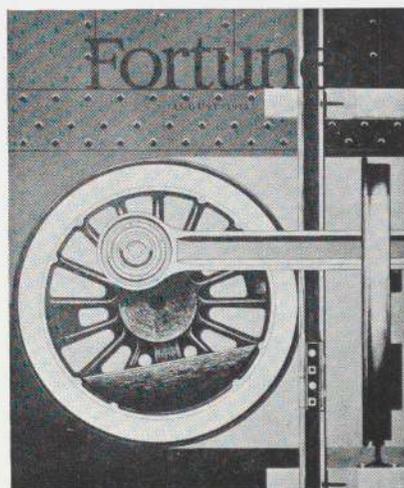


NATHAN: Poster. Paris. 1946

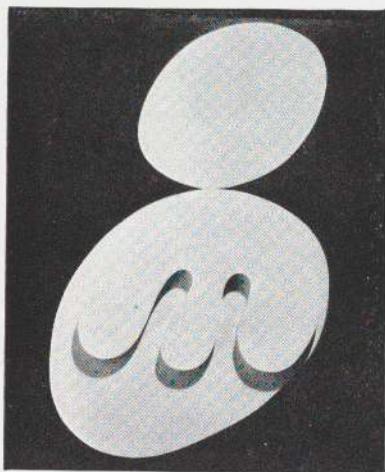


MCKNIGHT KAUFFER: Poster for American Airlines. 1948. Museum of Modern Art, Graphic Design Collection

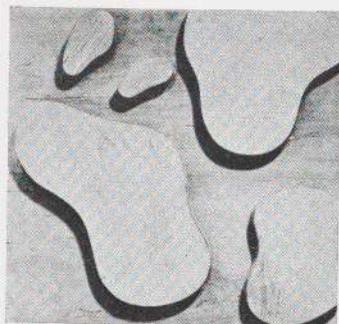
right: SEMENOICK: Cover for *Fortune*, August 1945. Museum of Modern Art, Graphic Design Collection



Abstract Organic Form

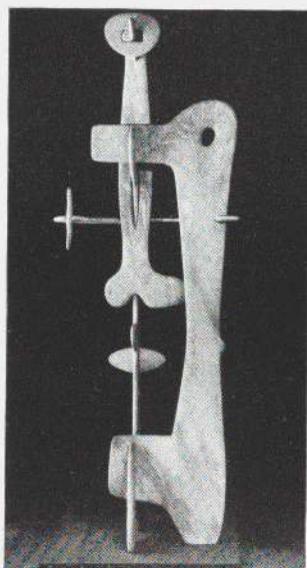


ARP: Two Heads. 1929. Painted wood relief, 47 $\frac{1}{4}$ x 39 $\frac{1}{4}$ ". Museum of Modern Art, Purchase Fund

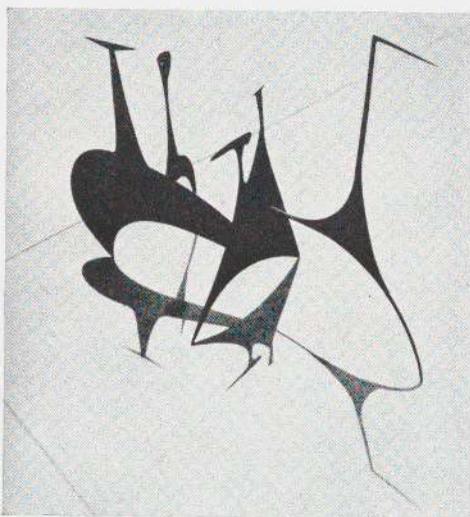


ARP: Relief. 1934-35. Wood, 19 $\frac{3}{4}$ x 19 $\frac{1}{4}$ ". Museum of Modern Art, gift of the Advisory Committee

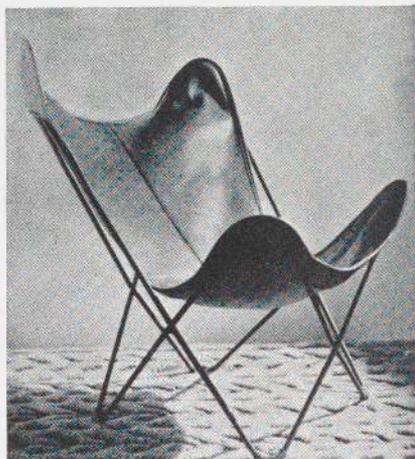
Assembled on the next four pages is a series of designs using shapes which, though abstract, suggest life. They are defined by an irregular, fluid contour that avoids the geometrically regular curve as consistently as the straight line. No part of this curve exactly resembles any other part. It is not produced by the repetition of a basic unit, but grows out of a growing, changing rhythm. The resultant form can therefore not be broken into parts and must be grasped as a



BRANCUȘI: Kouros. 1945. Georgia pink marble, 9' 9" high



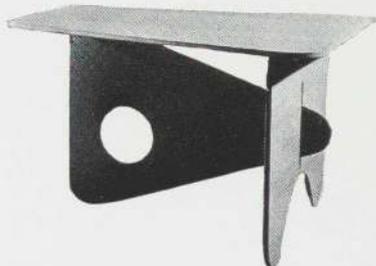
CALDER: Spiny. 1943. Stabile. Sheet aluminum, 26" high. Collection Herbert Matter, New York



BONET, KURCHAN and HARDOY: Lounge chair. Knoll Associates, New York. 1940. Museum of Modern Art, Industrial Design Collection



EAMES: Chair. The Herman Miller Furniture Company, Zeeland, Michigan. 1945. Museum of Modern Art, Industrial Design Collection



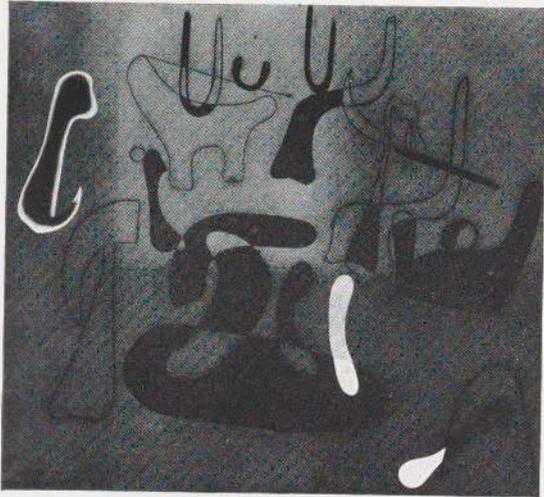
COOPER: Butterfly table. Drexel Furniture Company. 1942. Museum of Modern Art, Industrial Design Collection



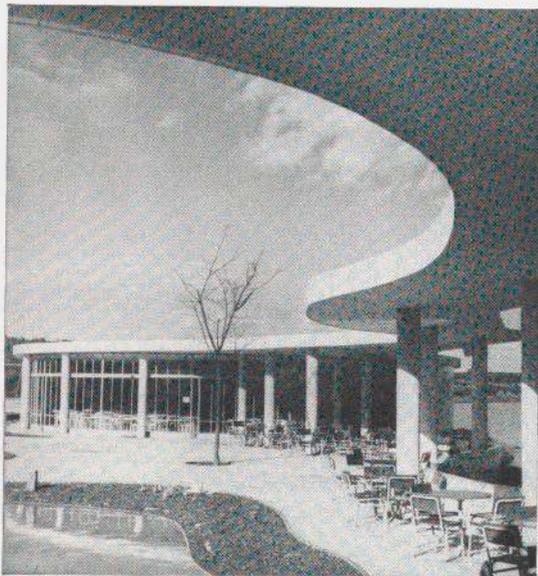
NELSON: Chart of furniture forms for Irving Harper Associates. 1949

unique whole. Similar organic abstractions dominate the two works shown at the top of the opposite page.

Each unit of these free forms is held together by a surface or contour tension such as is found in many living cells and organisms. Because its unifying principle is internal, each shape seems to contain the possibility of change (either of outline or position) without loss of identity. Thus where geometric abstraction, in which place and size is fixed by external relations, is generally static, these designs contain implicit movement, and they are surrounded by an indeterminate space.



MIRO: Composition. 1933. Oil on canvas, 68½ x 77¼".
Museum of Modern Art, gift of the Advisory Committee



NIEMEYER: Island restaurant at Pampulha, Brazil. 1942

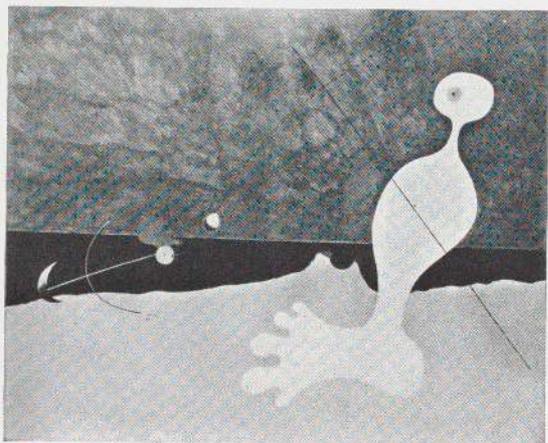
For these reasons, free form in its useful application can function by contrast and isolation rather than by integration (Morrison poster and Androl package). By being apparently cut out of a larger regular design, it calls attention to its own free, organic existence. It thus can serve to attract the eye to whatever it encloses. Designers use it to make lettering stand out (advertisement for Cyma watches), or to give added sharpness to realistic detail seen through its binding contour. Both are special applications of a new but now generally accepted style.

Of course new techniques and materials also literally help to mold some of these forms: the designer is now able to give to plastics and plywood shapes never before, or never easily, possible. He is also, in furniture and household wares, limited by function. But neither function nor technology really determines his form, since both can be satisfied by a variety of esthetic choices, and he often picks his material in order to arrive at a desired form. (Compare the ideal of geometric abstraction in the chairs shown on pages 12 and 16, with the ones illustrated on page 27.) Whatever his medium, the designer employs these forms because, as much as the artist, he takes pleasure in them, and his technique is the means of their creation. And it is evident that even traditional materials like pottery, glassware and textiles exhibit the new style.

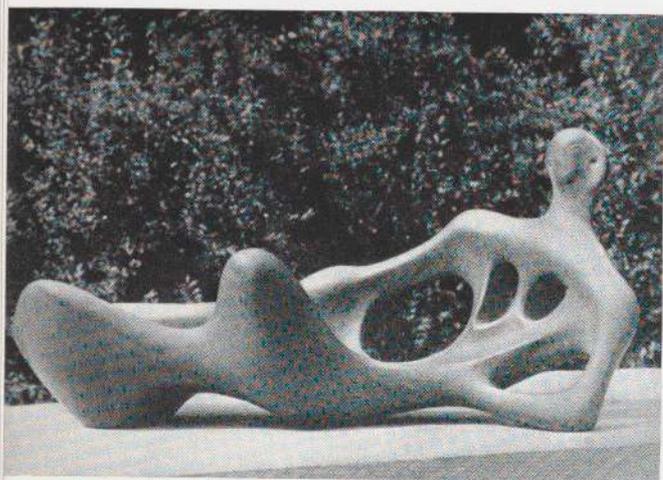
BEN ROSE: *City Symphony* No. 502.
Handprinted textile. Chicago



Organically Stylized Form



MIRO: Person Throwing a Stone at a Bird. 1926. Oil on canvas, 29 x 36 $\frac{1}{4}$ ". Museum of Modern Art, Purchase Fund

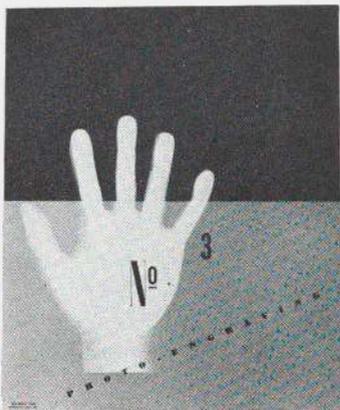


MOORE: Reclining Figure (No. 2). 1945. Bronze, 17 $\frac{1}{2}$ " long. Collection Nelson A. Rockefeller, New York

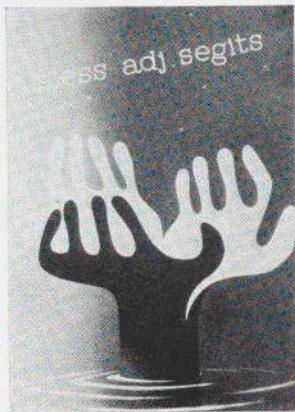
AICHER: Poster, *School Reform*. Jena, Germany. Museum of Modern Art, Graphic Design Collection

Just as a geometric form can be used to stress the mathematical order in animate as well as in inanimate subject matter, so organic form can be applied to the image. The former fits objects into a measurable rhythm. In contrast, the latter permits its figures fluidity of shape and indeterminate position. Skeletal structure is minimized in favor of bulbous or bladder forms. Contours are soft and continuous stylizations suggest that the more complex forms of life all evolve from simple cellular organisms and continue to bear a resemblance to them. Although isolated in it, they dominate the unbroken space surrounding them. Thus forms, instead of receiving the impress of a mechanical pattern, push and stretch into symbolic shapes. They retain a resemblance to the naturalistic species from which they have evolved; but they have their own laws of growth. Like the foot in

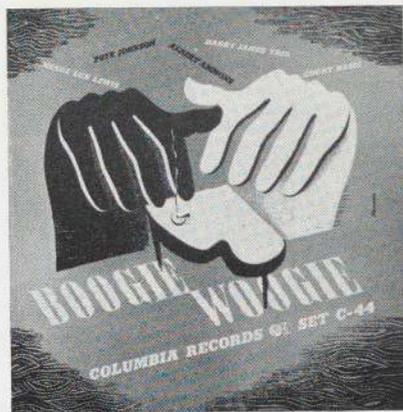




BEALL: Cover design for Sterling Engraving Company, New York. 1938. Museum of Modern Art, Graphic Design Collection

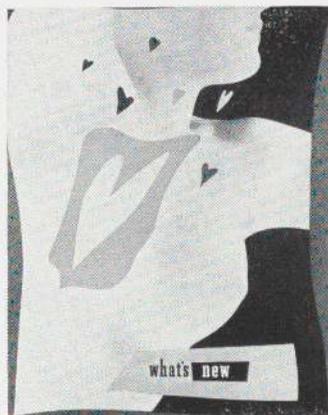


PAPP: Poster for Hungarian Ministry of Public Education. 1947



STEINWEISS: Cover for *Boogie Woogie*. Columbia Records. 1941. Museum of Modern Art, Graphic Design Collection

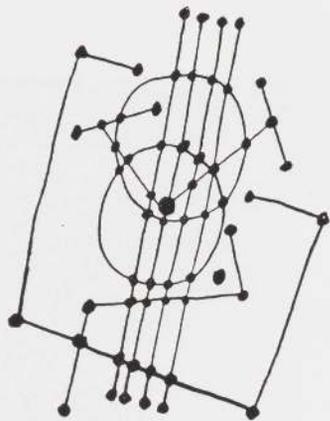
Miro's painting or the hands in the posters, they are living creatures, humorous or tragic comments on the human beings whom, despite all exaggeration, they still resemble.



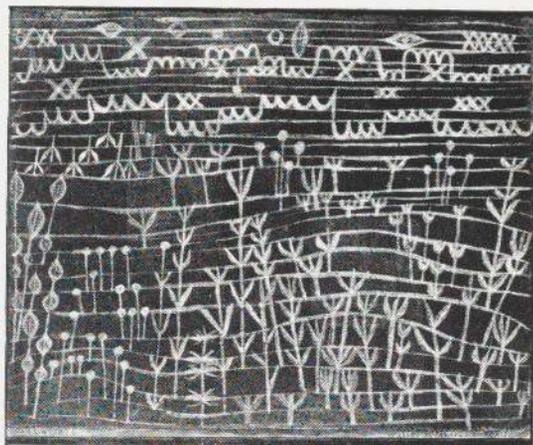
BEALL: Cover design for *What's New*. Abbott Laboratories, North Chicago, Illinois. 1939. Museum of Modern Art, Graphic Design Collection



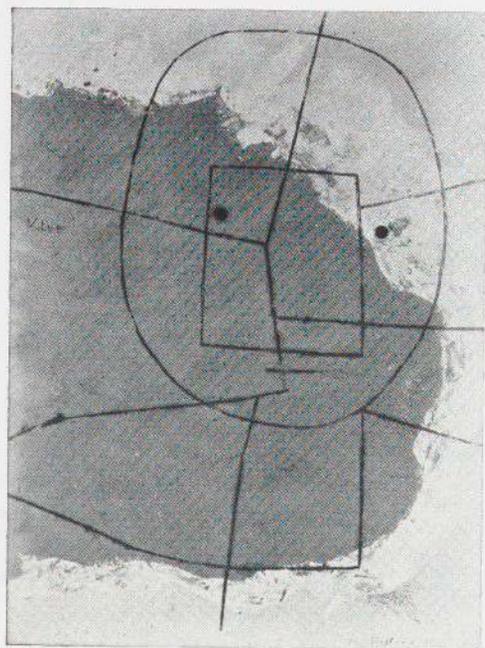
MOORE: Show window. Bonwit Teller, New York. 1944



PICASSO: Illustration for Balzac's *Le Chef d'oeuvre inconnu* (wood engraving after the artist's drawing). 1926. Museum of Modern Art, Gift of Henry Church



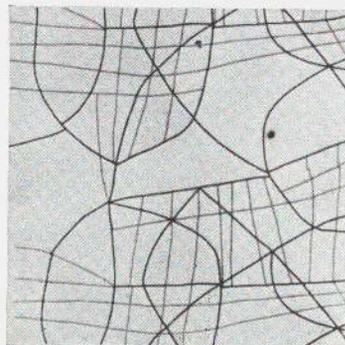
KLEE: Water Plant Scripts. 1924. Watercolor, 9½ x 11½". Collection Mr. and Mrs. Lyonel Feininger, New York

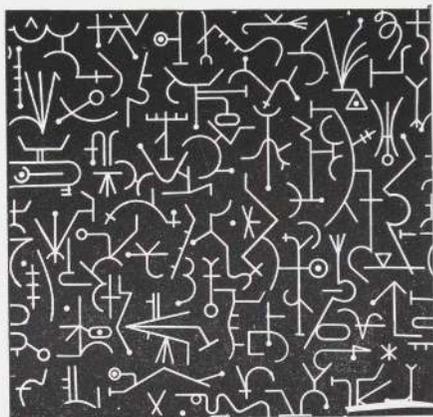


KLEE: One Who Understands. 1934. Oil on canvas, 21¼ x 16⅞". Collection Leland Hayward, New York

The style illustrated here, one of the most characteristic of the twentieth century, may be called the style of the wandering line. It is created out of a line that is apparently only aimless, but somehow emerges into a well-knit pattern; that is apparently only self-propelled, but also encloses form; that is apparently only abstract but does at least suggest representation; that is apparently spontaneous and thoughtless and yet achieves an extraordinary subtlety. It is always hovering on the brink of a decision which it never makes. Paul Klee is

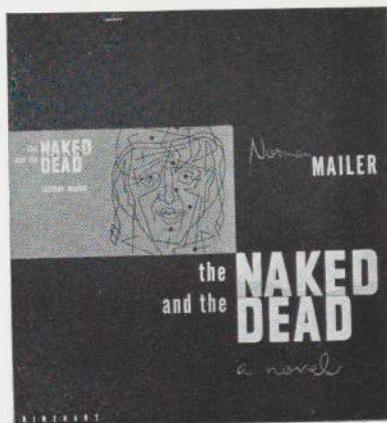
GIRARD: Wires. Textile. Knoll Associates, New York. 1936



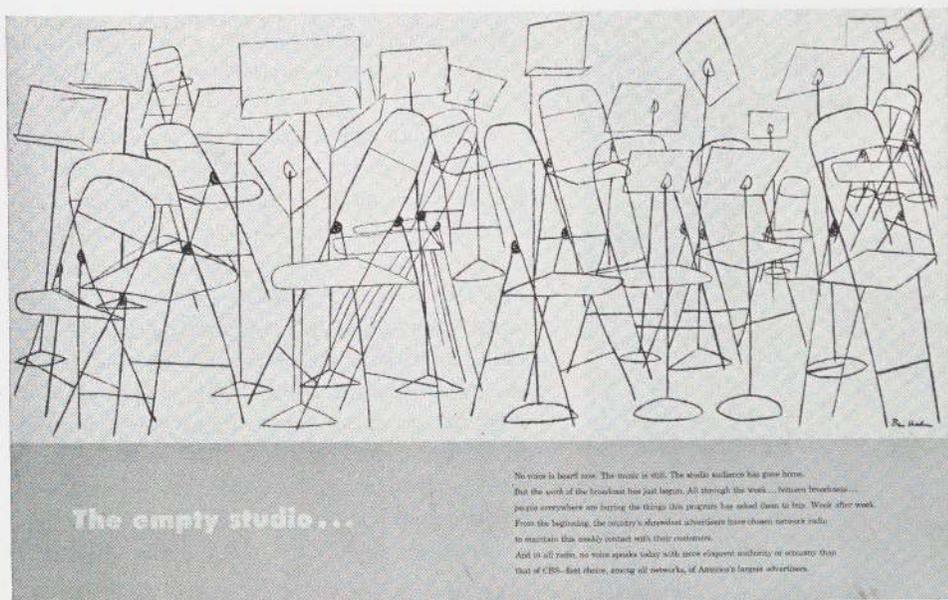


LUSTIG: Incantation. Textile. Laverne Originals, New York. 1948

of course the style's outstanding exponent, but it can be found applied in many branches of the useful arts. The ironic possibilities of its determined uncertainty have been used to advantage also by a number of cartoonists.

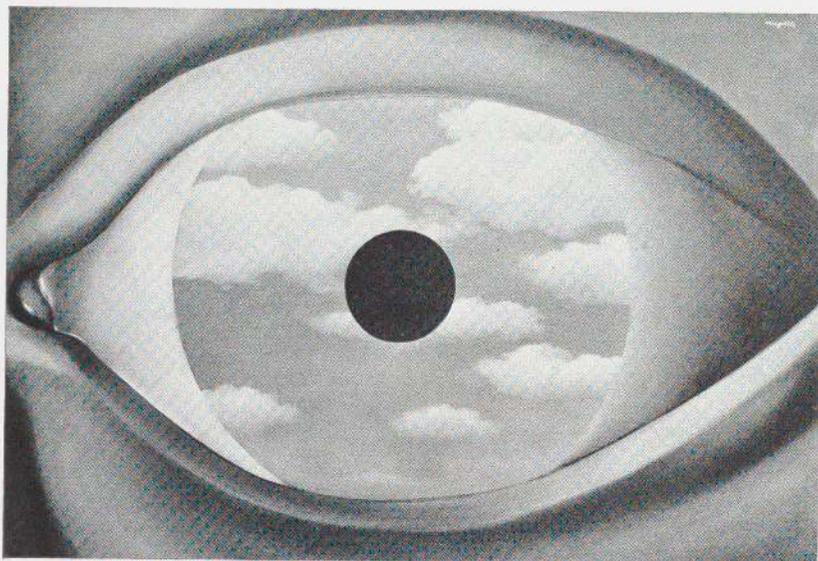


KAROV: Book jacket for Rinehart & Co., Inc., New York. 1948. Museum of Modern Art, Graphic Design Collection

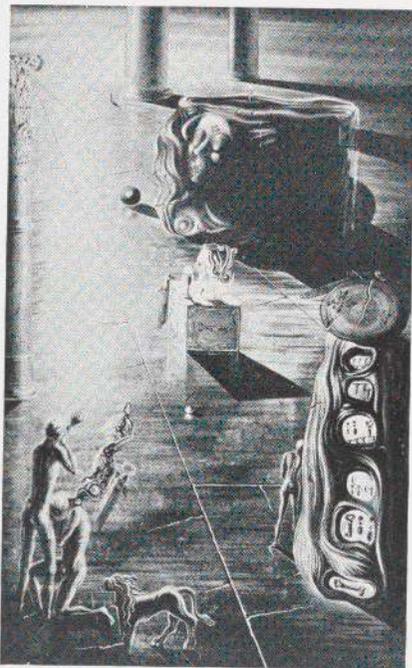


SHAHN: Advertisement for Columbia Broadcasting System. New York, 1948. Museum of Modern Art, Graphic Design Collection

Surrealism and the Fantastic



MAGRITTE: *The False Mirror*. 1928. Oil on canvas, 21¼ x 31⅞". Museum of Modern Art, Purchase Fund

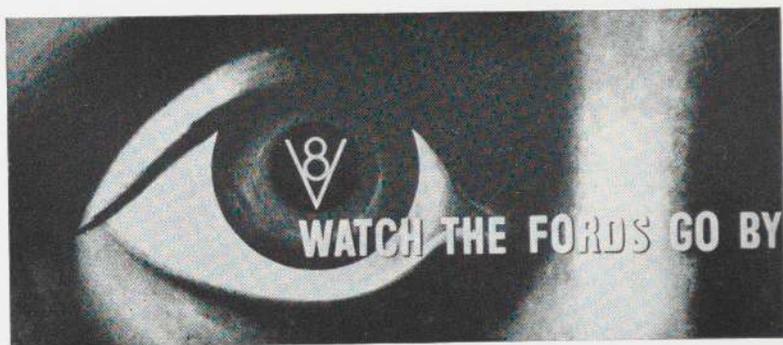


DALÍ: *The Font*. 1930. Oil on composition board, 26 x 16¼". Collection Mr. and Mrs. A. Reynolds Morse, Cleveland

The unifying principle running through all the paintings and the applied designs shown in this section, is incongruity. Both artist and designer employ a consistent inconsistency. They wish to surprise the observer to full awareness by bringing him up short against the unexpected. To achieve this impact, the artist violates custom and convention, and contradicts usual habits of seeing and accepted ways of "good" design. It is in this sense that surrealism is "inartistic" and gradually becomes "artistic" as its violations, by repetition, evolve into "laws" of design and arrangement. Full awareness of the shock of the unexpected must be based on accurate recognition of the familiar, and however unreal these works may be in their combinations, they are all painstakingly realistic in detail.

The extraordinary may be borne in upon the

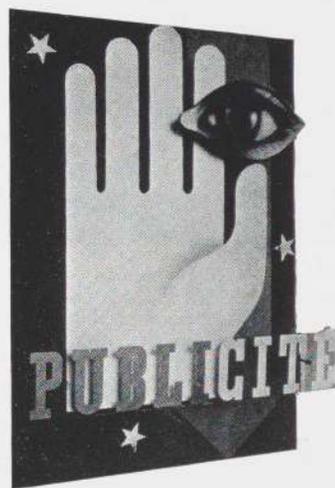
CASSANDRE: Poster for Ford Motor Company, Dearborn, Michigan. 1938. Museum of Modern Art, Graphic Design Collection



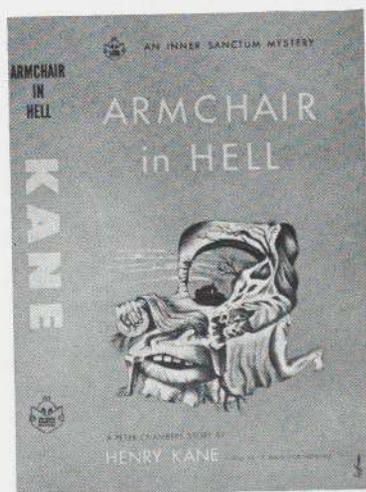
eye or the mind. It can be achieved by placing side by side two images having totally different contexts or associations. The double image, in which one form is visually, but illogically, built up of others, uses this method in its most concise form (Dali painting; *Armchair in Hell*). The impact of the impossible may also be conveyed by a purely visual incongruity or contrast, whereby the forced effort of unifying a variety of optical elements brings each one into sudden sharp focus. The most common visual device is a deep and empty space that juxtaposes the very near and the very far (Tanguy painting; Hawkins book jacket). In surrealist theory these effects are associated with the world of dreams and the subconscious; but the designer carries over the effect with little concern about theory.

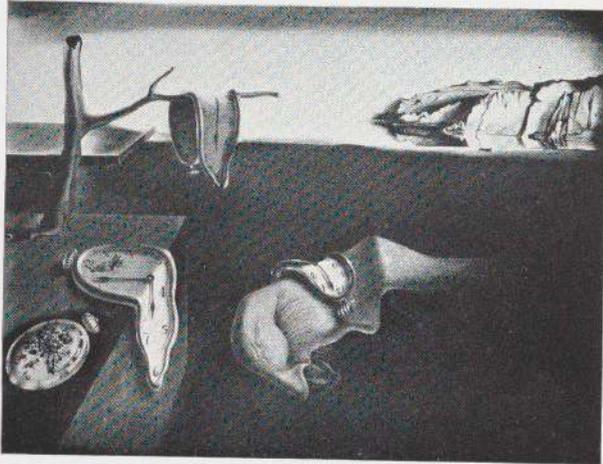
Like Magritte's painting, the posters shown with it extract a single feature from its context, portray it with great realism, and render it as if this independent existence were altogether normal. Large, and therefore powerful, it unaccountably wanders isolated in space. To externalize the eye, the inward seat of the soul, and make it into a thing and a creature, is a disturbing piece of psychological surgery.

HOFFMAN: Book jacket for Simon and Schuster, Inc., New York. 1947. Museum of Modern Art, Graphic Design Collection



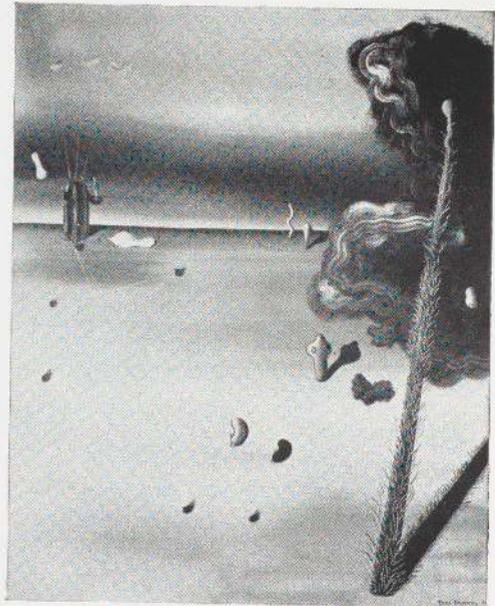
PICART LE DOUX and NATHAN: Three-dimensional poster. Paris. 1935





DALÍ: *The Persistence of Memory*. 1931. Oil on canvas, 9½ x 13". Museum of Modern Art

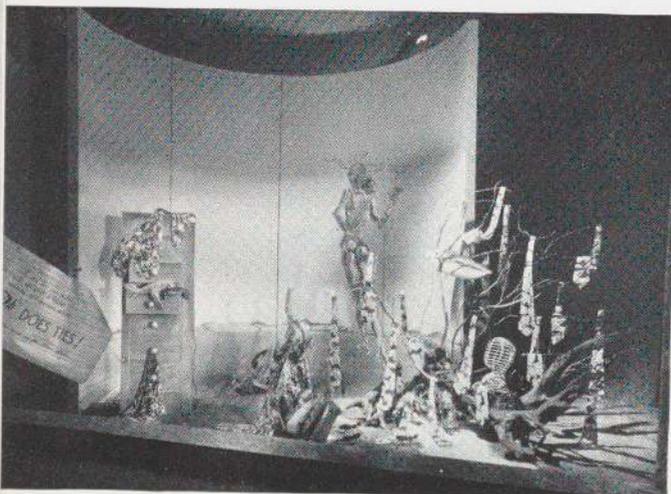
Isolation is the dominant feature of Tanguy's painting. We float above the vast, unbroken plain extending deep into the distance and continuing on under and behind us. Little isolated figures with shadows larger than themselves



TANGUY: *Mama, Papa is Wounded*. 1927. Oil on canvas, 36¼ x 23¾". Museum of Modern Art, Purchase Fund

are set like lost pins on this flat expanse, human symbols immobilized by the infinite but futile possibilities of space. The poignant contrast between these diminutive figures and their setting holds the attention. Modified in its applications, this style can suggest simple space (wallpaper), terror (book jacket) and loneliness (advertisement).

Dalí's space, though as deep as Tanguy's, is less haunting and more reminiscent of the measured perspectives of the renaissance. In keeping with this spirit, his figures are at home in it and move freely about. His use of the combined image to suggest two ideas at once is an intriguing device to hold the attention. It is well suited to commercial art, and he himself has made interesting use of its possibilities (*VOGUE* cover). The psychological connotations of his pictures, however, are rarely trans-

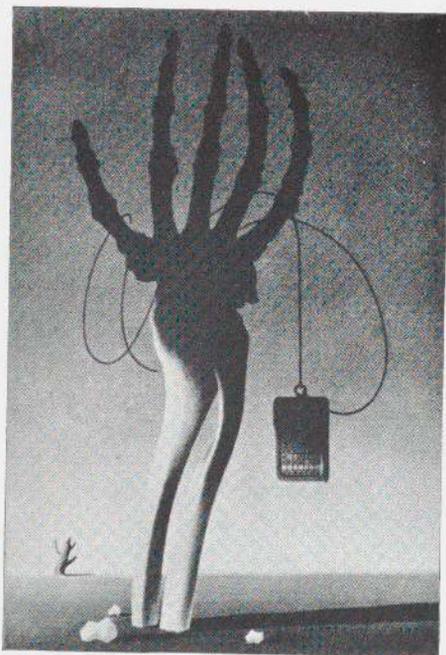
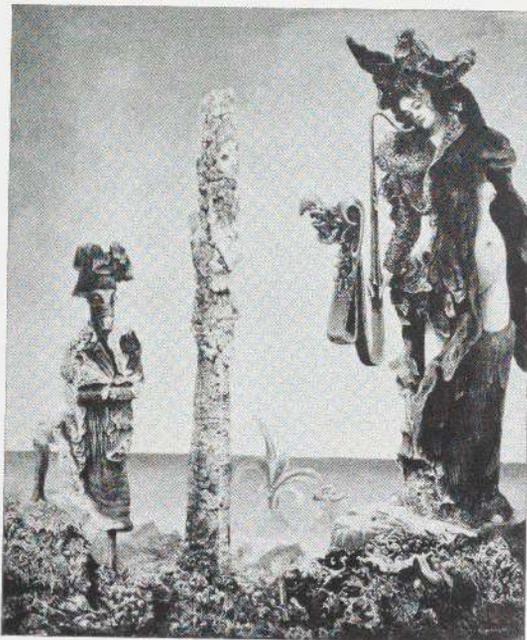


CALLAHAN: Show window for Lord & Taylor, New York 1945

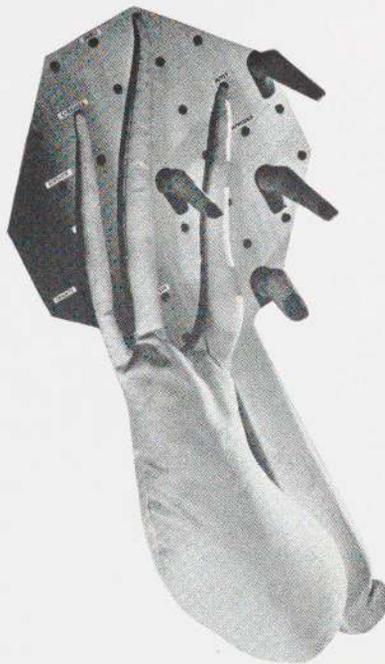
ferred; his symbols are adapted and in new contexts made to convey new and generally more literal meanings. (AOA poster; Lord & Taylor show window.)

The shock of Max Ernst's figures issues from their structure of incongruous parts. They start out as one thing and end up as another. In an entirely matter-of-fact way we are asked to accept an entirely new creature, combining in itself many contradictory moods and associations. We are torn between an imaginary whole and its realistic parts, deliberately never fused.

The meaning of these combinations cannot be resolved by studying the puzzle, as with Dali, yet they are so put together that they retain their power of mystery and suggestion. These devices have served the designers of both show windows and advertisements, transmuted from force into the elegance their subject demands.

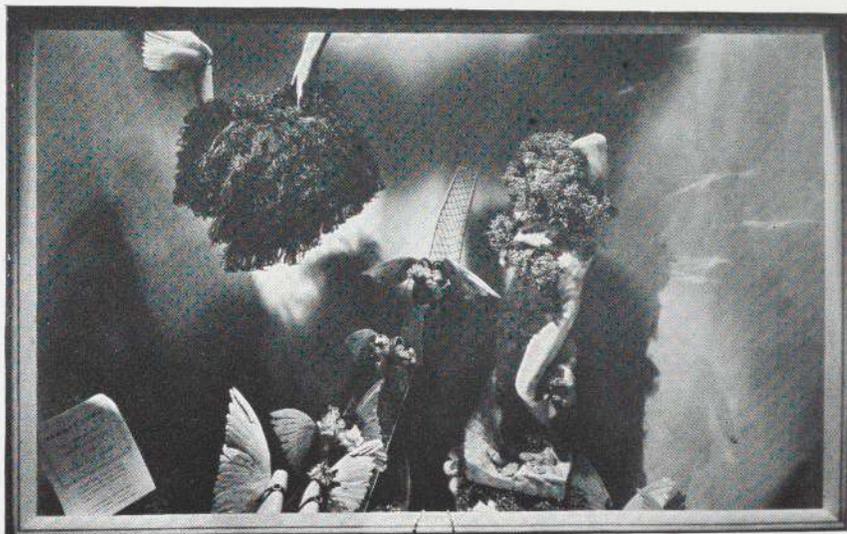


PAPP: Poster for Hungarian Ministry of Public Education. 1947

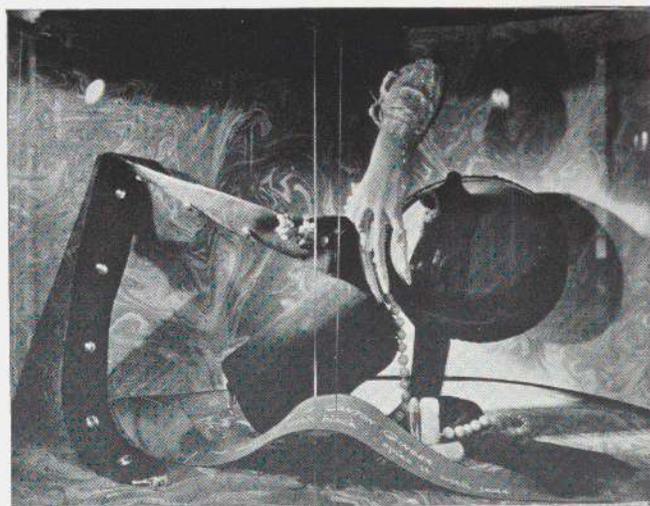


TANGUY: From the Other Side of the Bridge. 1936. Painted wood and stuffed cloth, 19 x 8 $\frac{3}{4}$ ". Collection Charles Ratton, Paris

opposite: ERNST: Napoleon in the Wilderness. 1941. Oil on canvas, 18¼ x 15". Museum of Modern Art, Purchase Fund



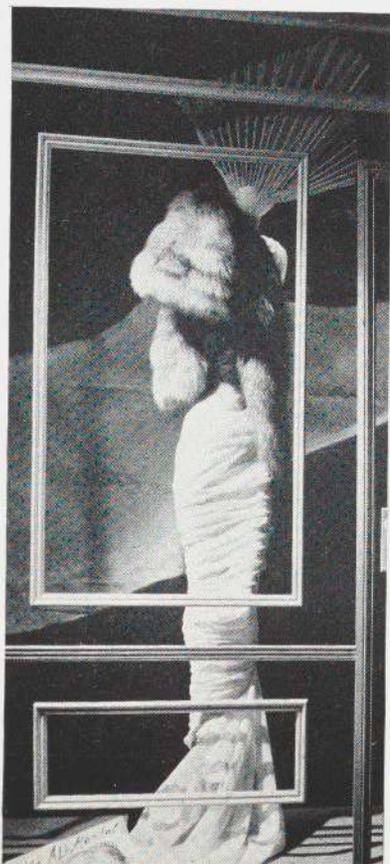
LEE: Show window for Bonwit Teller, New York. 1938



MOORE: Show window for Bonwit Teller, New York. 1946

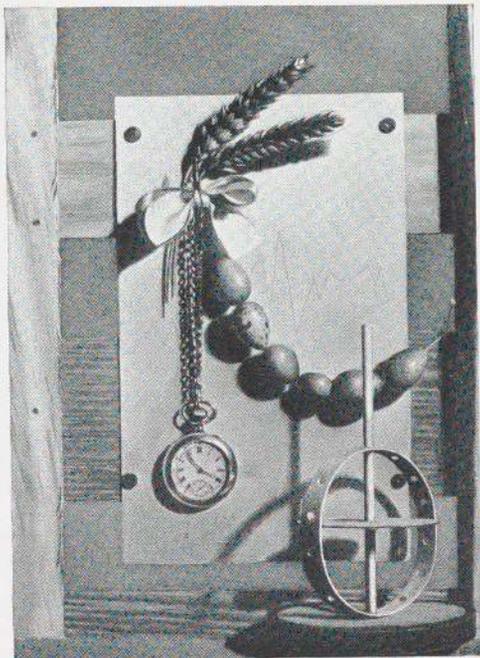


ERNST: Woman, Old Man and Flower. 1923-24. Oil on canvas, 38 x 51 1/4".
Museum of Modern Art, Purchase Fund



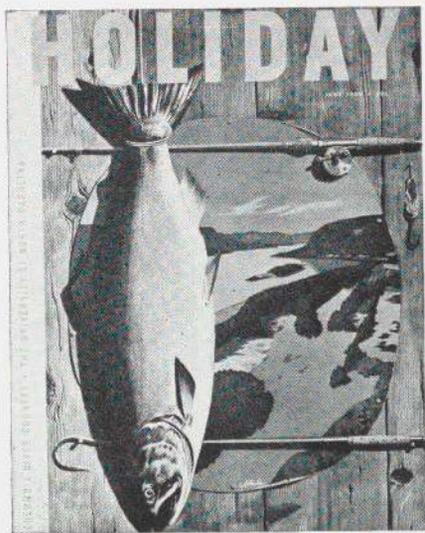
Section of show window for Saks Fifth Avenue, New York. 1945

VERTÈS: Show window for Saks Fifth Avenue, New York. 1948

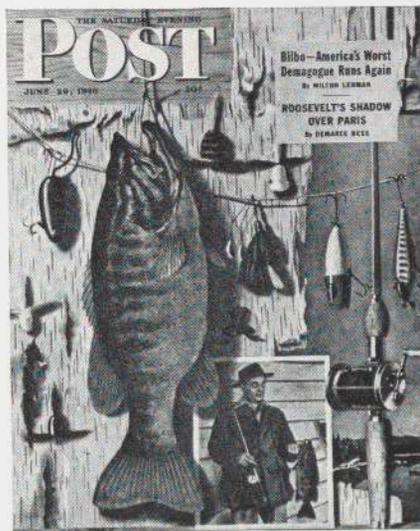


ROY: Daylight Saving Time, 1929. Oil on canvas, 21½ x 15". Museum of Modern Art, gift of Mrs. Ray Slater Murphy

Fool-the-eye painting has a long history; the modern artist has revived it with new overtones. In the past it used to delight by its skillful imitation of a stable reality. It still counterfeits, but the reality it copies so faithfully now turns out to be imaginary. So the artist plays a double game, contradicting his assertion that art is not what it seems, by suggesting that the world is something other than it appears. By unexpected combinations and unusual situations, by a fusion of near and far, by giving objects a twofold role to play, the artist makes us think once about the reality of his illusion and again about the elusiveness of the actual. The magazine covers are executed in this same spirit, with implications softened as befits their use.

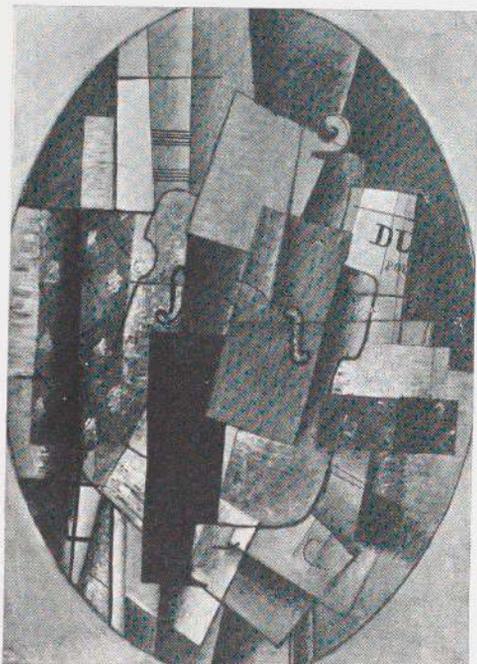


ATHERTON: Cover design for *Holiday*, June 1949. Museum of Modern Art, Graphic Design Collection



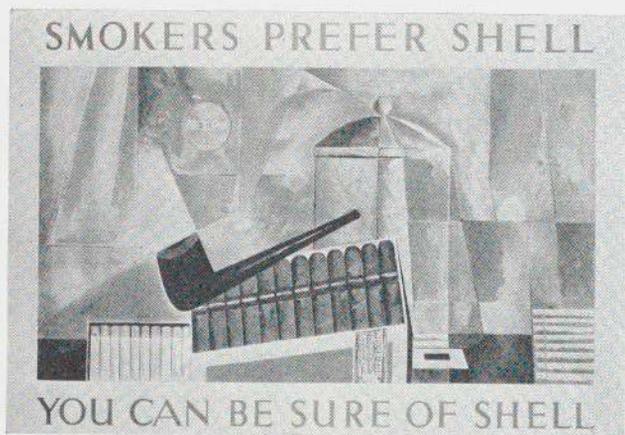
ATHERTON: Cover design for *The Saturday Evening Post*, June 29, 1949. Museum of Modern Art, Graphic Design Collection

Cubism



BRAQUE: Oval Still Life (Le Violon). 1914. Oil on canvas, 36 $\frac{3}{8}$ x 25 $\frac{3}{4}$ ". Museum of Modern Art, gift of the Advisory Committee

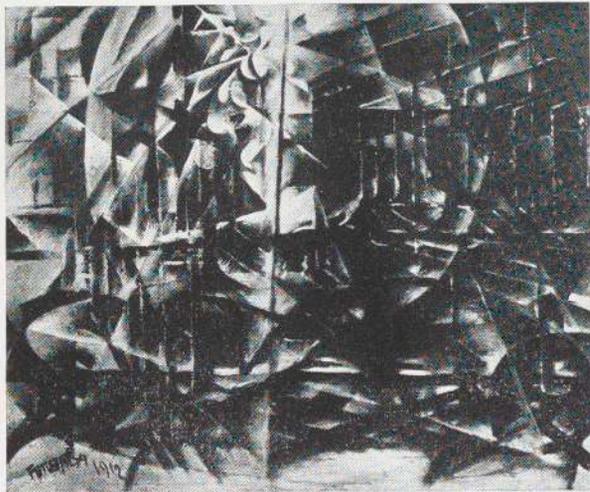
Cubism is one of the major styles of modern art and central in its influence on a great deal of painting and sculpture. But the cubist style as such is employed only rarely in the applied arts; its real influence is felt indirectly through the works of art whose style cubism helped to form. It is perhaps too subtle in surface, too intricate in its structure, for adaptation to the immediate effects required in most branches of useful design. Pottery and rugs are occasionally ornamented with what is in effect a cubist painting, stylistically unchanged, executed in another physical medium. The two posters illustrated here are instances of such use, even though one emphasizes faceted surface shading, and the other bas-relief space and overlapping planes. The cubist surface, static and delicate, may be



SHAW: Poster for Shell Oil Company, England



CARLU: Printers' bulletin. Christmas cover. 1929

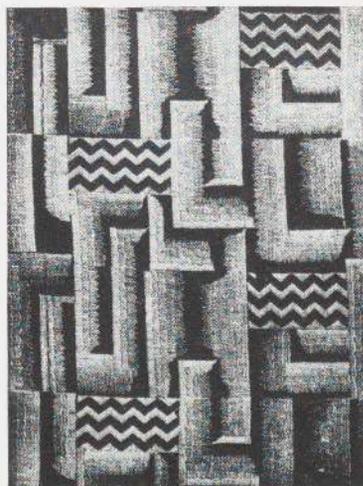
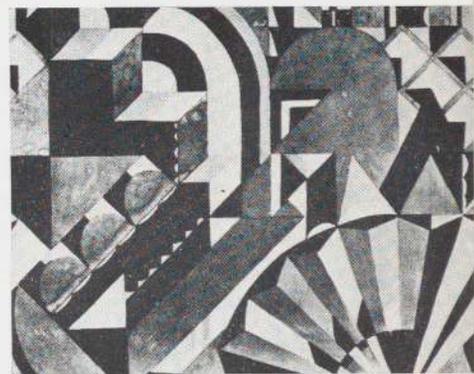


BALLA: Speeding Automobile. 1912. Oil on wood, 21 $\frac{7}{8}$ x 27 $\frac{1}{8}$ ". Museum of Modern Art, Purchase Fund

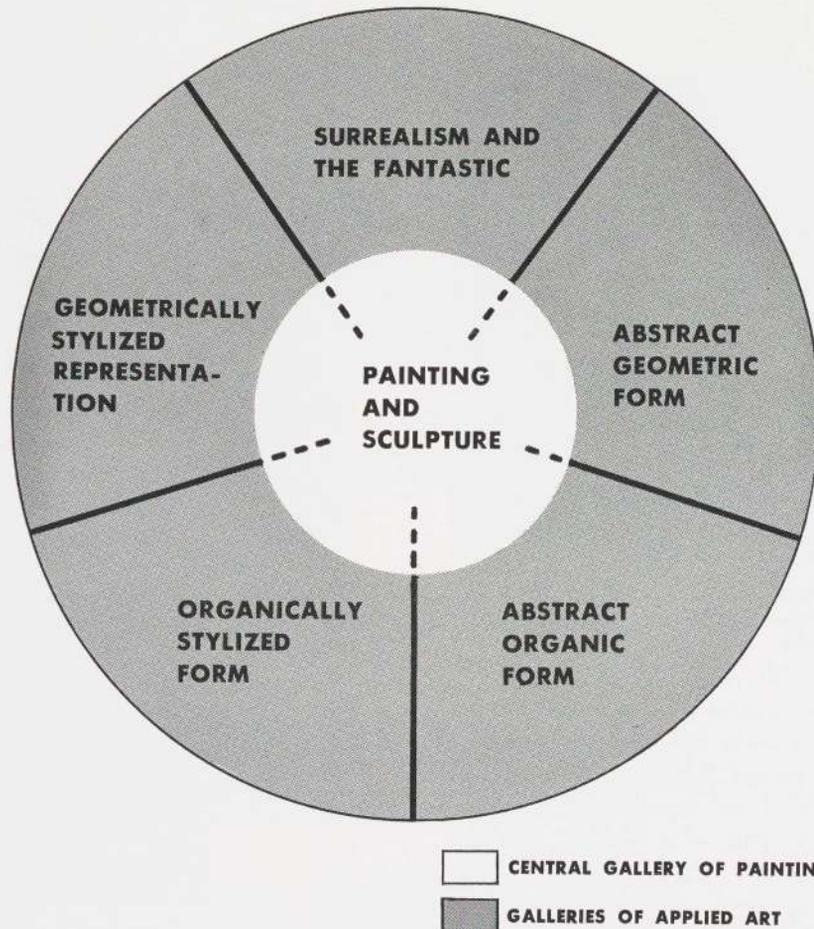
compared with the border treatment and linear movement of futurism in the sequence of three textiles. Cubism's indirect effect may be seen on earlier pages of this book. Its willingness to re-arrange objects in terms of a pictorial idea is

evident in the posters shown on pages 23 and 25; and in both the paintings and the examples of applied art of pages 22 to 25, may be found its interest in geometric structure transmuted through the vision of subsequent styles.

KERN: Design for painted linen. 1931



left: RODIER: Embroidered net for casement curtains. Paris, 1928. center: REISS: Chiffon design for Haas Bros., New York. right: REISS: Textile design. The Tavern Club, Chicago, 1929



The chart shown above is a schematic ground plan of the exhibition on which this publication is based. It also serves as a graphic presentation of the problems dealt with on the preceding pages.

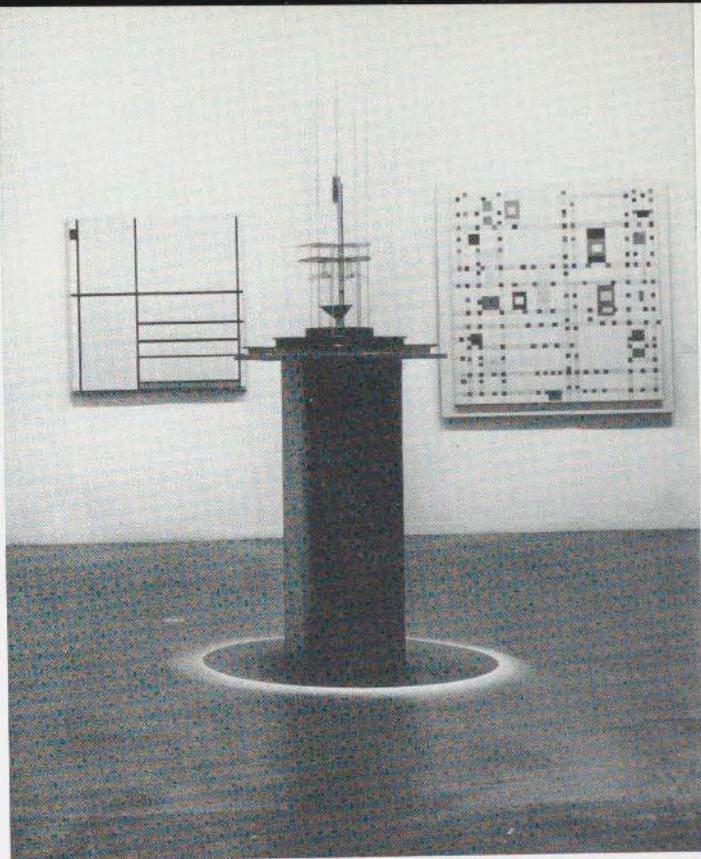
The center circle corresponds to the gallery of painting and sculpture that occupied the center of the exhibition. The works of art shown in this gallery were arranged in five groups, each representing a major style of modern art. Five doors, each in the center of one of these style groups, led to the five outer galleries devoted to the display of corresponding styles in architecture, industrial design and graphic design.

Thus the exhibition and this chart invite comparison not only between various branches of art

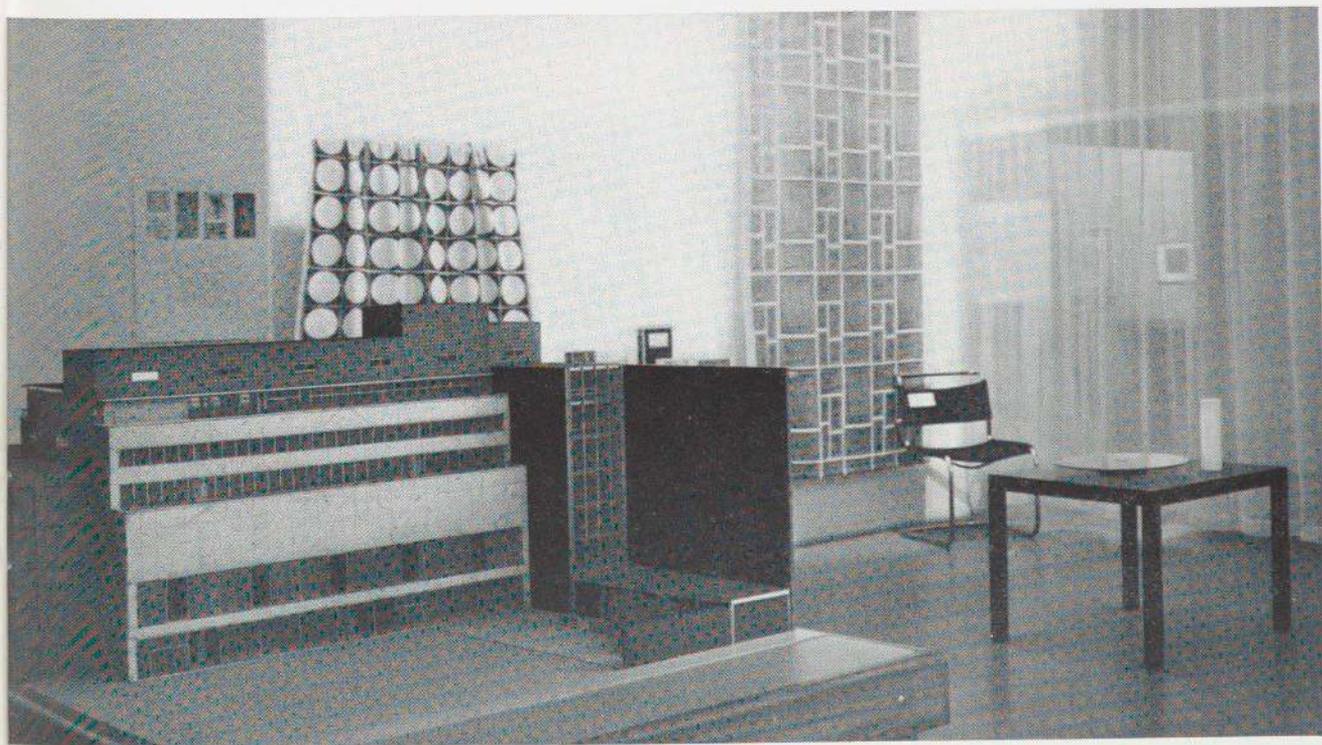
within the same style but also between the various art styles within the same branch.

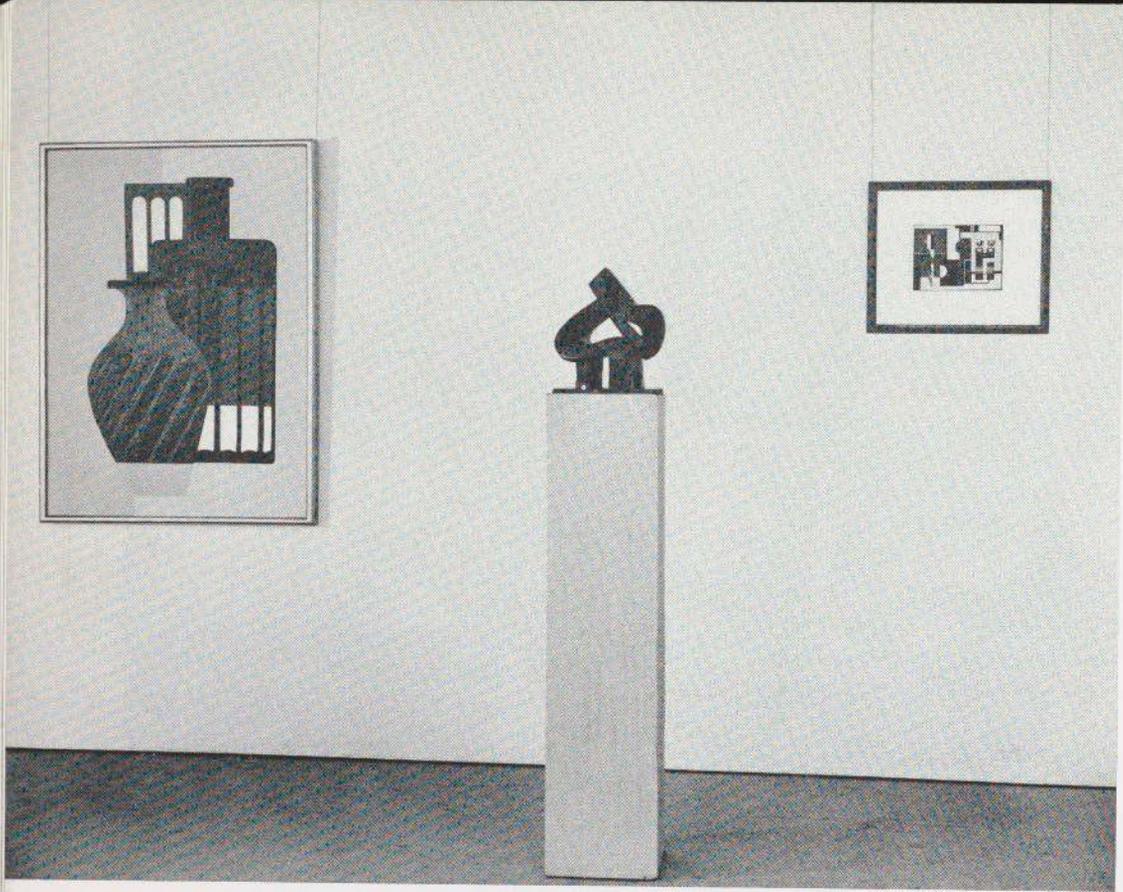
The photographs on the following pages were taken at the time of the showing of the exhibition *Modern Art In Your Life* held at the Museum of Modern Art in 1949. They are reproduced here to enable the reader to make his comparisons on the basis of impressions received from seeing entire groups of objects rather than particular pieces. For the purposes of this study it is dangerous to judge affinities between painting and sculpture and the applied arts of any given period from isolated examples. The resemblance between two individual works of art is often superficial and irrelevant and should always be checked by comparison of entire groups.

Abstract Geometric Form:
Section of the gallery
of painting and sculpture

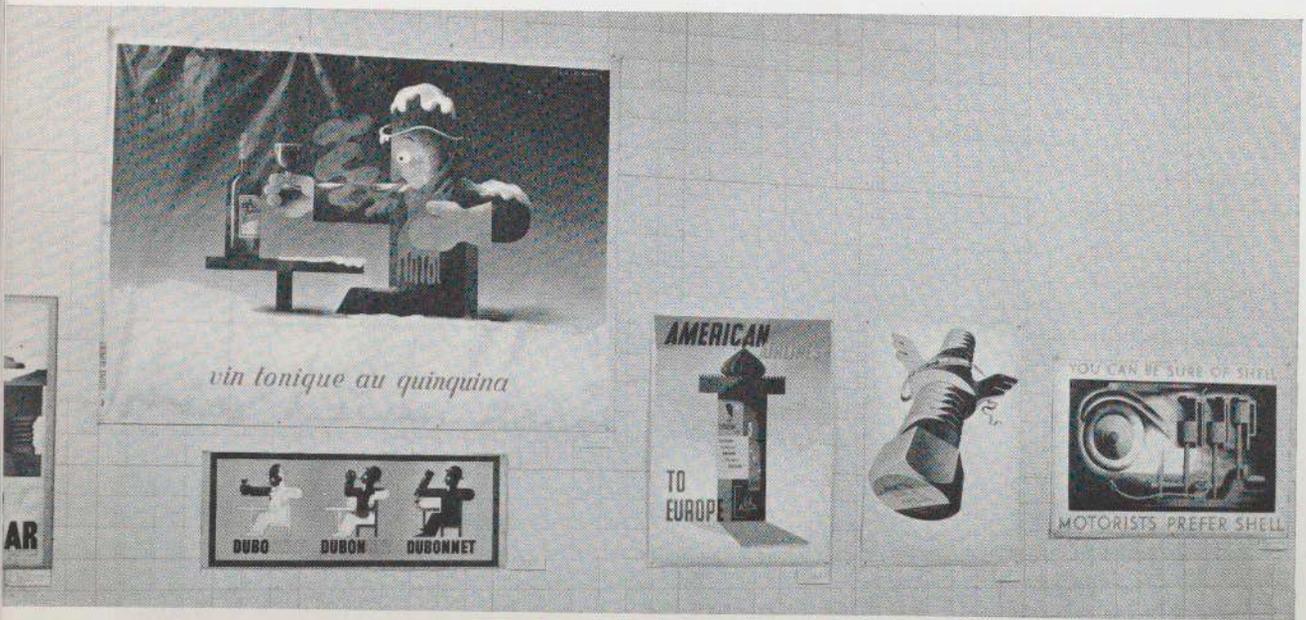


Abstract Geometric Form:
Section of the gallery
of architecture and design

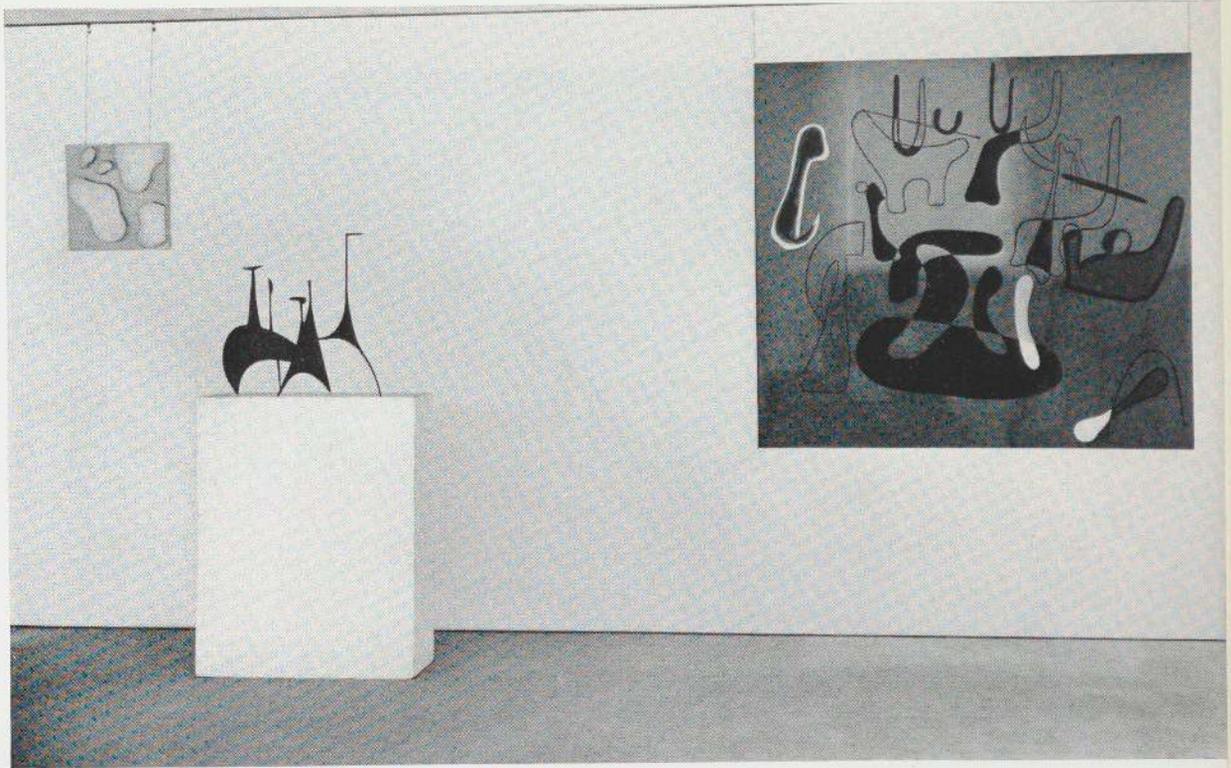




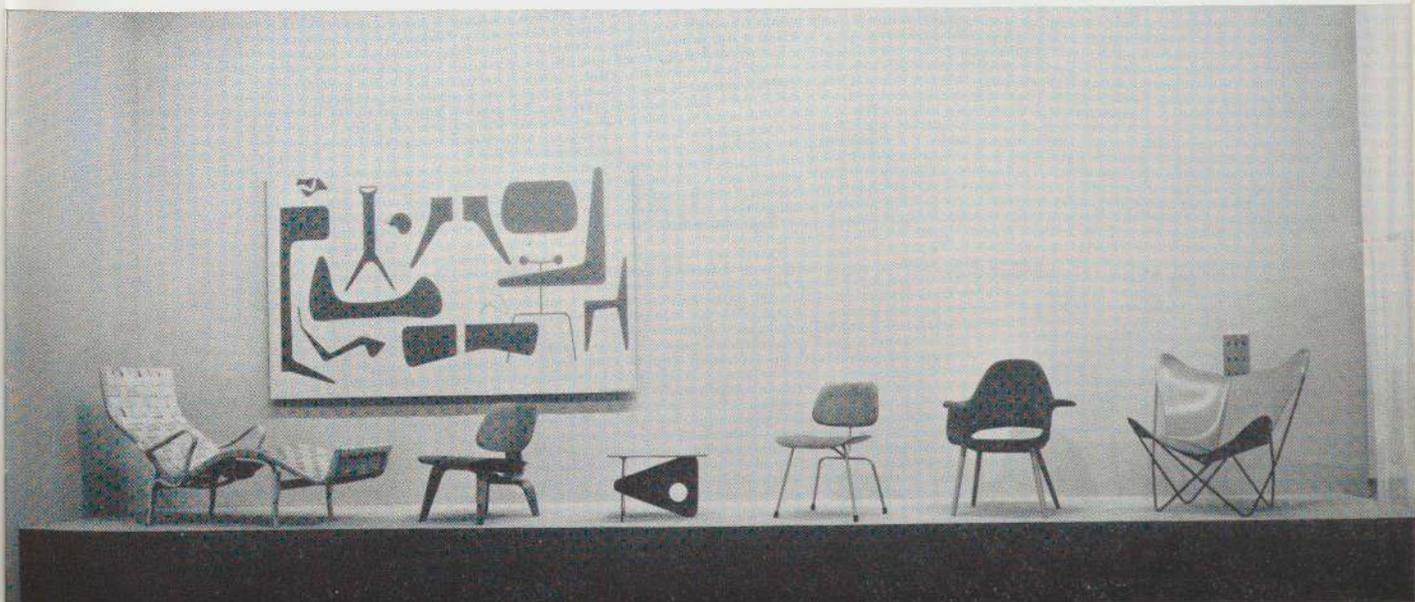
Geometrically Stylized Representation: Section of the gallery of painting and sculpture



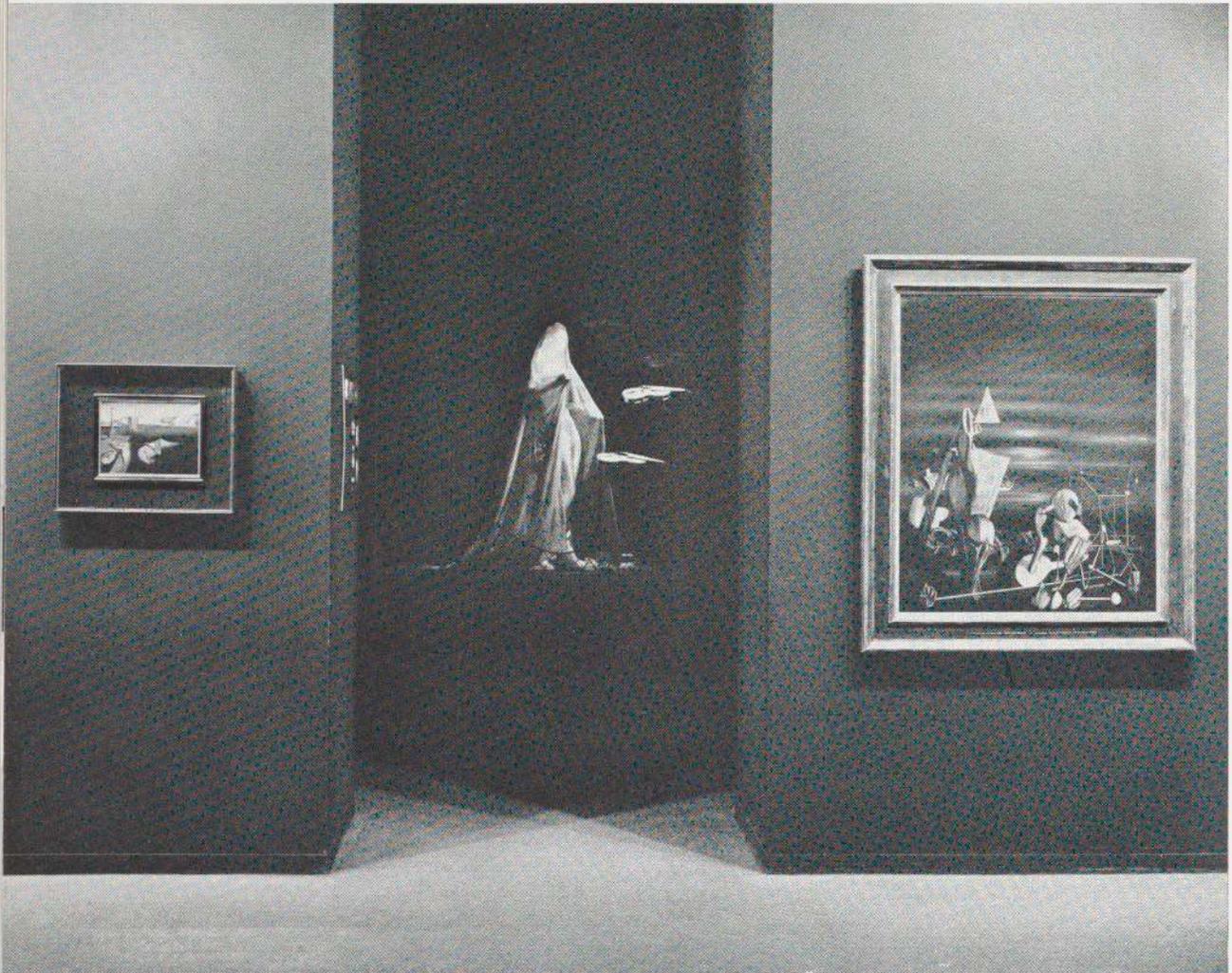
Geometrically Stylized Representation: Section of the display of graphic design



Abstract Organic Form: Section of the gallery of painting and sculpture



Abstract Organic Form: Section of the display of furniture design



Surrealism and the Fantastic: View of a show window display from the gallery of paintings and sculpture

