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Calendar of Events February 1935

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MACHINE ART

The beauty of machine art is in part the abstract beauty of "straight lines and circles" made into actual tangible "surfaces and solids" by means of tools, "lathes and rulers and squares." In Plato's day the tools were simple handworker's implements but today, as a result of the perfection of modern materials and the precision of modern instruments, the modern machine-made object approaches far more closely and more frequently those pure shapes the contemplation of which Plato calls the first of the "pure pleasures.”

Machines, are, visually speaking, a practical application of geometry. Forces which act in straight lines are changed in direction and degree by machines which are themselves formed of straight lines and curves. The lever is geometrically a straight line resting on a point. The wheel and axle is composed of concentric circles and radiating straight lines. The watch spring is a spiral. Sphericity and circularity are the geometrical characteristics of a ball bearing. Screws, bearings springs and propellers are variously beautifully—applications of the helix and helicoid.

STATIC AND KINETIC RHYTHMS

The beauty of machine art depends often upon rhythmical as well as upon geometrical elements—upon repetition as well as upon shape. The teeth of a saw form a simple static rhythmic series; the keys and levers of the cash register make a more varied and complex series.

Motion is an essential function of many machines and sometimes increases their aesthetic interest, principally through the addition of temporal rhythms, both of movement and of sound. The pistons of a locomotive or the rising and falling frames of a mechanical loom illustrate the point. On the other hand a propeller, a governor, a rotary saw, a ball bearing are more beautiful as objects when they are still or, better, moving very slowly. Even the streamlined object is more frequently admired when at rest than when in motion. Fortunately for this exhibition machines proper are only a small part of machine art as a whole.

TECHNICAL AND MATERIAL BEAUTY

In addition to perfection of shape and rhythm, beauty of surface is an important aesthetic quality of machine art. Perfect surfacess is, of course, made possible by the refinement of modern materials and the precision of machine manufacture. A watch spring is beautiful not only for its spiral shape but also for its bright steel surface and its delicately exact execution.

Machine art, devoid as it should be of surface ornament, must depend upon the sensuous beauty of porcelain, enamel, celluloid, glass of all colors, copper, aluminum, brass and steel. The circles and spheres of a ball bearing are greatly enhanced by the contrasting surfaces of brushed steel races, shining polished steel balls, and brass carriers.

VISUAL COMPLEXITY

The beauty in machine art as in all art varies in relation but not in proportion to its complexity. A watch crystal, perfect though it may be, is too simple a form to hold our visual interest long. A printing press, on the other hand, is too complicated an arrangement of shapes for the human eye to enjoy aesthetically. Moderately simple machine compositions such as the door of a wall safe, or the microscope, or our classical example, the ball bearing prove more satisfactory.

FUNCTION

A knowledge of function may be of considerable importance in the visual enjoyment of machine art, though Plato might have considered such knowledge an impurity. Mechanical function and utilitarian function—"how it works" and "what it does"—are distinct problems, the former requiring in many cases a certain understanding, but the spirit, the manner, of execution is a function of aesthetic values. Whoever understands the dynamics of pitch in propeller blades or the distribution of forces in a ball bearing so that he can participate imaginatively in the action of mechanical functions is likely to find that knowledge enhances the beauty of the objects. In the same way, using or understanding the use of the calipers, the retort, or the rotary floor polishing is likely to increase their aesthetic value.

Fortunately the functional beauty of most of the objects is not obscure and in any case, so far as this exhibition is concerned, appreciation of their beauty in the platonist sense is more important.

MACHINE ART AND THE DESIGNER

The previous paragraphs have considered the aesthetic enjoyment of machines and machine-made objects without mentioning their designers. The designers are of two kinds, technical and artistic. Often one man will combine both roles. For even the most impractical and fantastic "styler" of "modernistic" plumbing fixtures (not included in the exhibition) must geared to machine technique. Machine-made imitations of craft objects are parodies, and the real handicrafts have disappeared.

In the development of the design of machines and useful objects, the nineteenth century is an anomaly. In previous periods the normal tendency had been to utilize the best technical and mechanical devices known and to design for these devices. After the invention of the potter's wheel, vase designs were logically based on its use. But in the nineteenth century technique and design were divorced. Machines made bad designs while good designs continued to be executed by primitive methods.

The twentieth century is gradually rectifying this anomaly and is returning to the more reasonable principle of designing tools and useful objects with reference to the latest technical, out of the most durable materials, and as economically as possible. In the same way the mother art of architecture has achieved style after the revival of the nineteenth century by the more fusing with the latest technique of building science.

[The above paragraphs are reprinted from the History of Machine Art, by Mr. Philip Johnson, in the before-mentioned Catalogue.]

MACHINE ART AND HANDICRAFT

The history of machine art is interwoven with that of handicraft but in spirit machine art and handicraft are diametrically opposed. Handicraft implies irregularity, picturesque, decorative value and uniqueness: figured textiles, pottery vessels, decorative friezes, hand-wrought metal work, hand-hammered silver bowls. The machine implies precision, simplicity, smoothness, reproducibility: plain textiles, vases as simple as laboratory beakers, smooth polished metal work.

The difference between craft and the machine lies in spirit and convention as much as in actual method of manufacture. Tools, and simple machines have always been used; the potter's wheel and the handloom are machines. Modern equipment is merely more efficient and complex. But whether the designer sits at the loom and works up the pattern as he weaves or whether a motor weaves and the designer sits in an office, the actual work is by machine. A man at a hand loom can weave a rug of machine-like simplicity. A glass blower can make laboratory beakers as well as picturesquely shaped vases. But the craft spirit does not fit an age

The beauty of all natural objects is also a by-product—the helleb of a snail's shell (and a steel coil), the graduated feathering of a bird's wing (and the leaves of a laminated spring), the rabbit's footprints in the snow (and the track of non-skid tires), the elegance of fruit (and of incandescent bulbs).

"INDUSTRY AND CULTURE"

It is in part through the aesthetic appreciation of natural forms that man has carried on his spiritual conquest of nature's hostile chaos. Today man is lost in the far more treacherous wilderness of industrial and commercial civilization. On every hand machines literally multiply our difficulties and point our doom. If, to use L. P. Jack's phrase, we are 'to end the divorce' between our industry and our culture we must assimilate the machine aesthetically as well as economically. Not only must we bind Frankenstein—but we must make him beautiful.

Copper Flower Bowl — Chese Brass & Copper Co., Inc. Walter von Nessen, designer

Outboard Propeller — Aluminum Company of America

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Outboard Propeller — Aluminum Company of America
EXHIBITIONS OUTSIDE OF PROVIDENCE

Gallery of Fine Arts, Yale University, New Haven, Conn.
Feb. 2-16—Designs for stained glass from the D'Ascenzo Studios.
Feb. 16-Mar. 2—Watercolors by Eilot O'Hara.

Lyman Allyn Museum, New London, Conn.
Feb. 1-28—Oil paintings by Cleveland artists.

Feb. 1-21—Midwestern watercolors.
Feb. 1-28—Paintings by Ormer Lasonde.
Feb. 1-Mar. 5—Modern European textiles.

Museum of Fine Arts, Boston, Mass.

The Guild of Boston Artists, 162 Newbury Street, Boston, Mass.
Feb. 4-16—Henry W. Rice memorial exhibition.
Feb. 18-Mar. 2—Landscapes by members of the Guild.

Feb. 1-23—Prints by Rembrandt.
Feb. 6-28—English watercolors of the 19th century.
Feb. 6-28—Chinese Folk Design in Textiles.

Feb. 1-26—Drawings by modern German sculptors.

Fitchburg Art Center, Fitchburg, Mass.
Feb. 1-26—Paintings by Lila Cabot Perry.

Feb. 2-26—Wood Engravings by Winslow Homer.
Feb. 4-18—"The Last Supper," by Tiepolo (Loaned by the Wadsworth Atheneum).
Feb. 20-Mar. 13—Designs by students of Mr. Joseph Binder, Art Institute of Chicago.

Feb. 9-Mar. 9—Centenary exhibition.
Feb. 9-Mar. 9—Cleveland print makers exhibition.

Jan. 18-Feb. 5—Paintings by Margaret P. Surroc. February—Textile exhibition.

The Museum of Modern Art, New York City
Jan. 30-Mar. 7—Three individual exhibitions: George Caleb Bingham, Missouri painter; Gaston Lachaise, American sculptor; Henry Hobson Richardson, pioneer of modern American architecture.

CALENDAR

All events listed are open to the public.

Sunday, February 3
Sunday Gallery Talk, "Corot at the Museum" by Miss Dorothy B. Bely, Museum of the Rhode Island School of Design, 3:30 P. M.
Poetry reading by Susane Y. Mitchell, Faunce House Theater, Brown University, 4:00 P. M.

Monday, February 4
*Benefit Concert under the auspices of the Federal Hill House School of Music. Plantations Auditorium, 8:15 P. M.

Sunday, February 10
Sunday Gallery Talk, "Modern Machine Art" by Royal B. Farnum, Museum of the Rhode Island School of Design, 3:30 P. M.
Poetry reading by Archibald MacLaish, Faunce House Theater, Brown University, 4:00 P. M.

Thursday, February 14
*Concert by Pro Arte String Quartet under the auspices of the Department of Music, Brown University. Alumni Hall, 8:30 P. M.

Friday, February 15
*Concert by the University Glee Club, Verna Osborne, meso-soprano, assisting artist. Memorial Hall, 8:15 P. M.

Sunday, February 17
Sunday Gallery Talk, "Japanese Prints" by Miss Miriam Banks, Museum of the Rhode Island School of Design, 3:30 P. M.
Lecture on the program of the Boston Symphony Orchestra by Dr. W. Louis Chapman under the auspices of the Monday Morning Musical Club. Providence Public Library, 4:00 P. M.
Drama Tea, Paravent Playhouse, 4:00—6:00 P. M.

Tuesday, February 19
*Concert by the Boston Symphony Orchestra, Serge Koussevitzky, conductor, Myra Hess, pianist, assisting artist. Metropolitan Theater, 8:15 P. M.

Wednesday, February 20
*Sock and Buskin present "The Two Orphans." Faunce House Theater, Brown University, 8:30 P. M.

Thursday, February 21
*Federation Day Concert sponsored by the Chaminade Club, Edward Austin Kane, tenor, recitalist. Plantations Auditorium, 3:15 P. M.
*Sock and Buskin present "The Two Orphans." Faunce House Theater, Brown University, 8:30 P. M.

Friday, February 22
*Sock and Buskin present "The Two Orphans." Faunce House Theater, Brown University, 8:30 P. M.

Saturday, February 23
*Sock and Buskin present "The Two Orphans." Faunce House Theater, Brown University, 8:30 P. M.

Sunday, February 24
Oratorio Society concert, Mendelssohn's "Elijah." Elmwood Congregational Church, 3:00 P. M.
Sunday Gallery Talk, "Why Silver is Industry," by Sidney Rullings, Museum of the Rhode Island School of Design, 3:30 P. M.

Tuesday, February 26
Bach program by Gertrude Prokosch Kurrath, dancer, and Arthur B. Hitchcock, pianist and organist, assisted by the students of the Federal Hill House School of Music. Alumni Hall, 8:30 P. M.

*Admission charged.

EXHIBITIONS IN PROVIDENCE

Faunce House Art Gallery, Brown University
Feb. 5-26—Exhibition of machine art from the Museum of Modern Art.
Feb. 12-23—Student Picture Lending Library.

John Hay Library, Brown University

Museum of the Rhode Island School of Design
Feb. 5-26—Exhibition of machine art from the Museum of Modern Art.

School Gallery, Rhode Island School of Design
Feb. 1-14—Creative expressions by the pupils of the Hughes High School of Cincinnati under William P. Teals.
Feb. 25-Mar. 9—New designs for wallpaper from the Imperial Paper and Color Corporation.

Plantations Club
Feb. 13 (2:50 P.M.)—Portraits and still life in oils by Mary Frazier.

Providence Art Club
Feb. 1-10—Photographs by Mrs. Rowena Brownell.

Tilden-Thurber Gallery
Feb. 1-28—Paintings by old masters.
Feb. 1-28—Etchings by Arthur Heintzman. (Print Room)

N. M. Voce Gallery
Feb. 1-28—Paintings and pastels by F. Usher De Voll.
Feb. 1-28—Etchings by a group of American etchers.