

# plus

February 1939

2

## **Contents:**

**The Question of "Truth"**

**by Fernand Leger.**

**Regionalism in Architecture**

**by Richard J. Neutra.**

**Alexander Calder: Movement as Plastic Element**

**by James Johnson Sweeney.**

**Tuberculosis Clinic**

**by I. Cardella and L. Martini.**



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February 1939

2





## THE QUESTION OF "TRUTH" BY FERNAND LEGER

One might think that the moving pictures, for instance, could represent the "truth." Not at all. They are the product of actors, stage sets, make up, all that is artificial. In moving pictures we are far from "truth," very far . . .

If one day they will invent an apparatus which will make it possible to take moving pictures of people who are not aware of being photographed, through the opening of a door, through a keyhole—12 hours of the life of a family— . . . we may have "truth." If they would project the whole thing without retouching, crude, just as it is, you would be frightened by the unexpected aspect of the result. We are living in such an artificial way that "truth" will appear as surprising as the opening of a new world.

A considerable part of our life is spent in hiding the truth which always tries to break out. Education, religion, the "decorative life" are three inventions, three envelopes created to conceal the truth. However there would be no art, no science without "truth" which is the driving power, the means of control for every moving or useful work that man has created for his daily satisfaction.

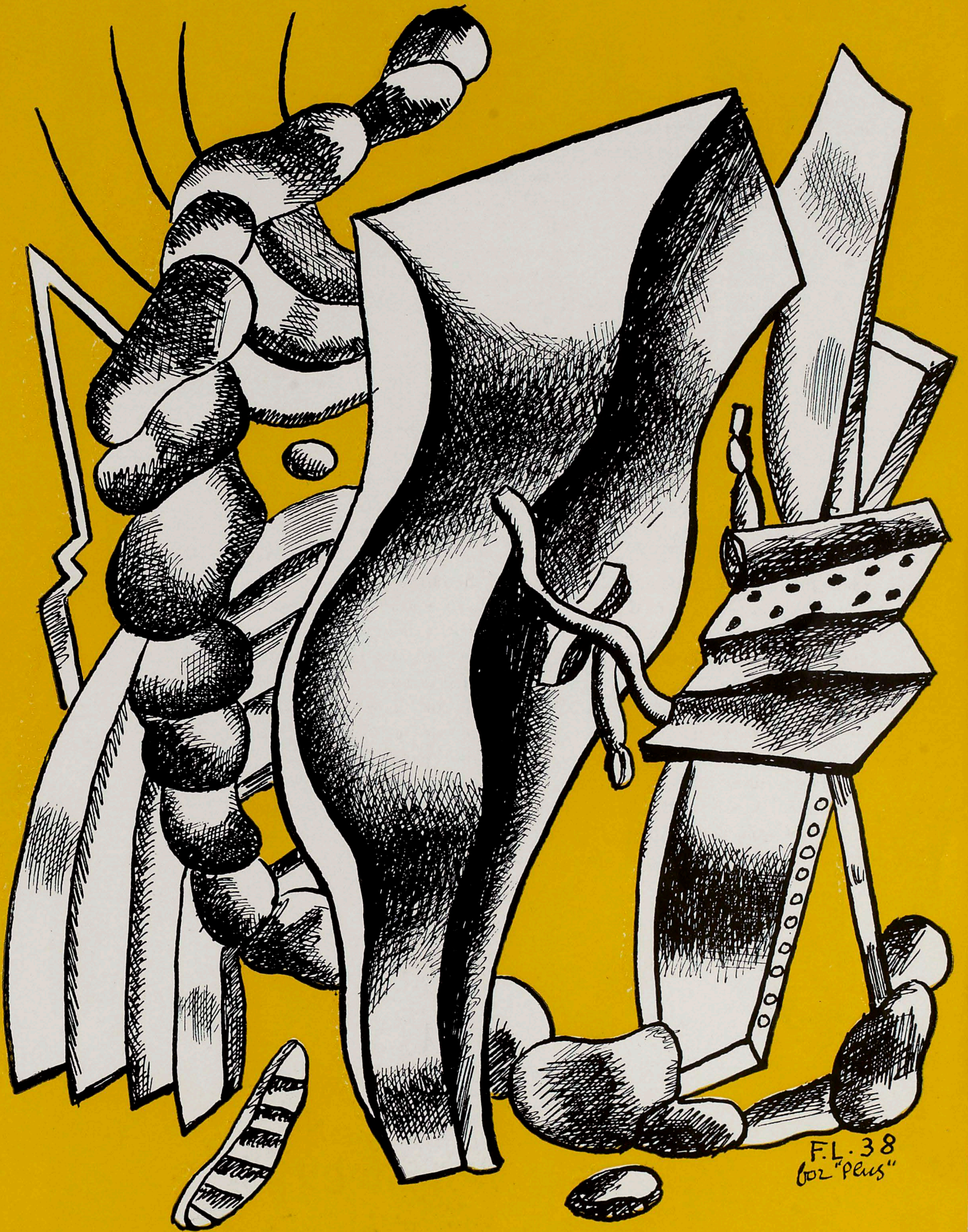
This concern about "truth" is always present in us, around us, everywhere; for truth possesses the force of natural non-controllable events. There is the tempest, the cyclone in it; it can be the cause of irreparable disasters. Conventional order in a society is organized below that vital line. Consequently it is possible for society to achieve a certain harmony of relationships. The "enfant terrible" who speaks the truth is a nightmare for the rest of the family; he is the ill-bred child. As a solution they invented a decorative life, an education, religion . . .

"Truth" in painting is color at its fullest; red, black, yellow, since the pure tone in painting is reality. Also it is the use of pictural contrasts, the design that reinforces color, the form (objective or invented) which together with color and design creates an equivalent of the real. The fear of truth however, will make the people prefer the other . . . The other is the decorative picture which fuses itself with everything, harmonizes with everything, the "painting of repose."

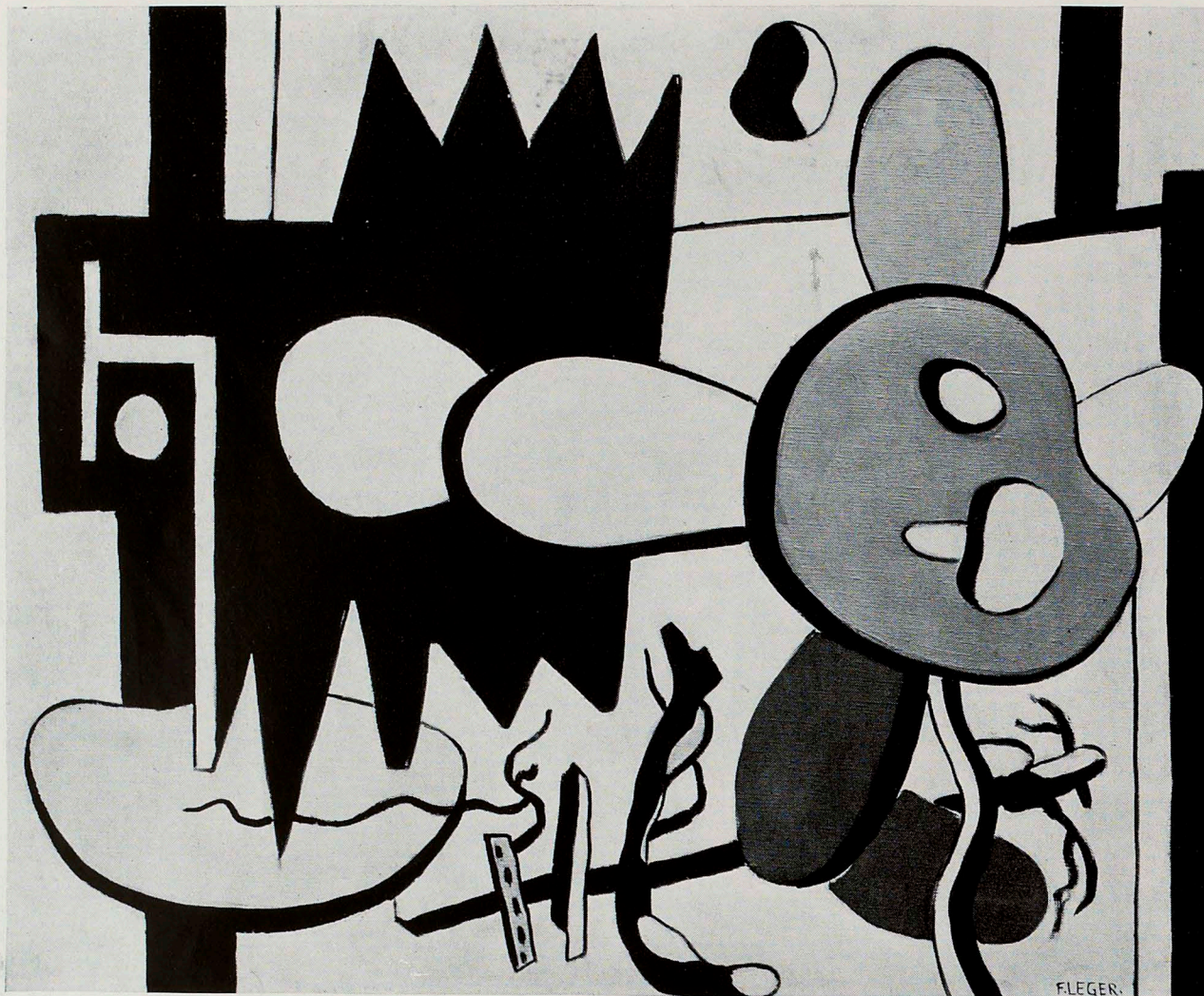
The beautiful picture makes another story. It is an event in the home with all its consequences; it takes the leading role, the center of the action in the room; the furniture is adjusted to it. The difficulty is to find place for such a major force because a painting is the antithesis of a wall. It also is an "enfant terrible."











Fernand Leger : Flower and Butterfly, oil, 1937



Fernand Leger : The White Chicken, oil, 1937





Fernand Leger : Man and Melon, gouache, 1938



# REGIONALISM IN ARCHITECTURE

An "international architecture" has existed at various periods in history. Hellenistic and Roman formulas seemed to apply from the West-European islands well into the Asiatic continent. Again, two thousand years later, government buildings in Copenhagen, Hongkong and Washington were in a similar way dominated by a common "classicism." Derivatives of the Louvre and the Place de Caroussel are found from Bucharest to Buenos Aires. In all these cases formal treatment was largely independent of technology; colonnades, cornices, porticos were constructed without much pretense of being derived from material specifications. There was no claim that local determinants guided the designer to layout and appearance.

In contrast with this, contemporary architectural theory has argued the importance of adequate adjustment between the apparent form, the carefully fitted layout and the structural system chosen. The beginnings of "Modern Architecture," according to indications and researches of Adolf Loos and Siegfried Giedion, reach back into the nineteenth century. In this way they coincide with the growth of a world wide commerce which in that period was assuming cosmopolitan color. It is characteristic that the first broad attention was reaped by the movement for modern building design twenty years ago, just at the time a League of Nations and the founding of an Inter-

national Labor Bureau seemed thoroughly feasible schemes.

The whole period was colored by such ideal conceptions. But, as a matter of cold fact, our own time distinguishes itself by an often painful inequality of regional living standards, and wage levels which are embarrassingly varied in different parts.

In different places and on different levels there is a most irksome gradation of economic capacity—or perhaps better, incapacity—to absorb technological and industrial advance. This is especially true in the case of Housing.

And what is more, there exists today wide and troublesome variety of governmental policies chopping up the civilized world into patches separated from one another by strict moral and political boundary lines. Militant segregation interferes with the exchange of ideas as well as the exchange of commodities and especially those half-finished products which constitute the output of the building supply industry in the different countries.

Even in the United States the present Federal Marketing Laws Survey, a Federal research project, shows that the individual States tend to use every conceivable means, even unconstitutional ones, to barricade themselves against one another and against what they consider upsetting imports.

Widely varying and often prejudiced local building legislation, sometimes based on tradition, sometimes on the

whims of the consumer—of loan institutions, or of the contractors—produces even within the same country, a variety of building routines. The greater part of the components of such laws is indefensible in the light of contemporary technology.

Technology may or may not be the common denominator of building advance. However, the regional variation in the consumer's psychology and in his economic opportunity to reap its benefits, gives the true color to this transitory situation, especially in the design of private dwellings.

The acceptable minimum in a region is always related to, and reflects, the common average in the same region. The consumer's idea of a probable and desirable obsolescence rate, his peculiarly graded anticipation of durability of structure, finishes and accessories, his routine pre-estimate of maintenance and utility costs, and the standard of hygienic cleanliness—all this is quite varied even between different sections of the United States.

The customary requirements of dwelling and furnishing, in the way of "necessary" rooms, of acoustic and of visual privacy, may have been more similar to that of Los Angeles of today in a scattered, decentralized Williamsburg, Virginia of 1700 than they are in contemporary San Francisco.

A costly permanence of material and construction may be favored in certain localities and there willingly

balanced by extended amortization periods. The same permanence is however dreaded in a metropolitan region of quickly shifting employment markets and recurrent insecurity. For after all, even the most modest rental depends on continuance of wage income.

What in practice may be called Modern Architecture is far from being international. In fact it is much farther from it than was classical design since the so-called "Modern Architecture" professes to be conscious of all these factors and to use them as inspirational stimuli as well as programmatic items.

A modern attitude in building design may well have the rational tendency to arrive at an optimum standard for projects, which are determined by almost identical circumstances; it may be opposed to arbitrary diversification. We may hope that the inequality of habitational standards will be reduced in some not too distant future. However today building programs are geographically diversified due to the most irregular rise and fall of the economic-technological tide in various parts of the earth.

One factor that causes building possibilities in certain European countries, Japan, Mexico, and the United States, to vary so widely is the cost of labor on the premises. The lower this is, the more prohibitive it makes the use of a shop fabricated parts. Thus what is a logical design conception, let us say in

Southern California, may become a futuristic extravaganza in Mexico City.

Building design is a creative integration of the architectural details which are the products of the architect's inventiveness. In one place the local economic conditions may call on his ability to devise building specialties and structural ingredients to be made up "ad hoc"; in another, his role will be that of arranging and coordinating standard articles obtainable in the open market. The combinations and mutations of these two cases within the realm of the eighteen or twenty interlocking trades employed in constructing a simple dwelling, are manifold.

A complex mosaic of most consequential cost-information characterizes each geographical region. Cost-information may be divided on the basis of field-labor and shop work; it may concern itself with standard or specially built units. The economy, even feasibility, of a floor plan is governed by conditions of plumbing-labor in the field, or by the local tradition in heating devices and by fuel prices. In one place the additional cost of fabricated steel joists may be balanced successfully by the possibility of shortened runs of plumbing pipes. In another case this feature might prove totally non-determinant.

A few significant material selections, a few basic details, enforced by local economics may change the entire appearance and layout. Each set of fundamental details and specifications

demand a genuine esthetic digestion of its own particular combination of economic, technical circumstances.

Certain optimum combinations (and therefore esthetic types) will develop into standards. But these may quickly change again at any shift of balance in matters of the intricate technical economies in that particular region.

Architectural appreciation in purely handicraft periods of the past was indeed decidedly simpler than it is today. Now building designers base their work and concepts in part on industry and in part on individual skill. The proportion changes from place to place and some times from year to year. Some future day perhaps the gap may be closed again. Industrialism may actually produce a generic unity of procedures and qualities; economic and political separatism may be reabsorbed into a cosmopolitan system of broad distribution and consumption.

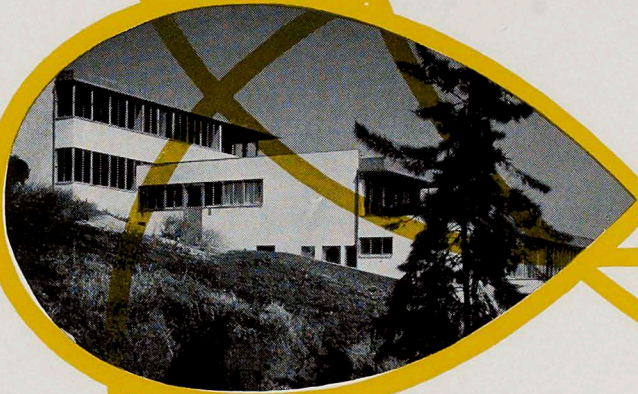
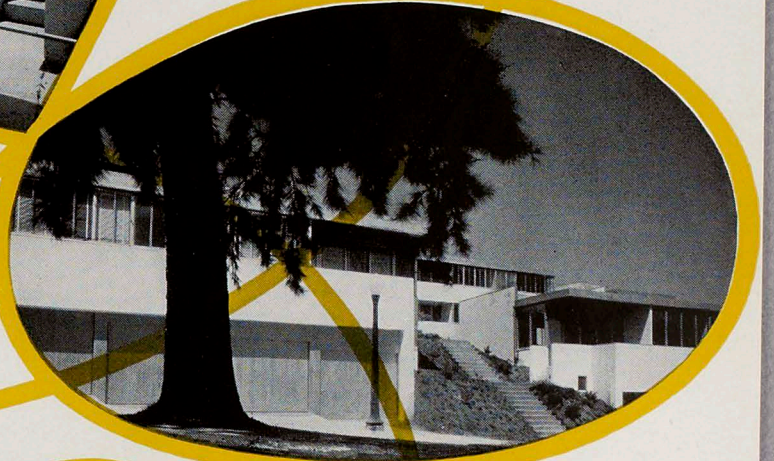
But for the time being architecture can scarcely be called "International." The planner is faced by intricate local problems. The artisan on the premises is always trying to adopt his skill to the ever changing requirements. It is not strange that the consumer is bewildered.

Some fear that the world is coming to dreadful uniformity and monotony. If so, this day is yet far off. At present we may rather shudder at the terrific, often senseless, variety of it all.

**Richard J. Neutra**



Strathmore Dwellings, Westwood, California, designed by Richard J. Neutra, architect, and Peter Pfisterer, collaborator.







Pen and ink drawing from the "Fables of Aesop" and wire sculpture by Alexander Calder. Background: Skywriting, photograph by U. F. A.



# ALEXANDER CALDER: MOVEMENT AS A PLASTIC ELEMENT

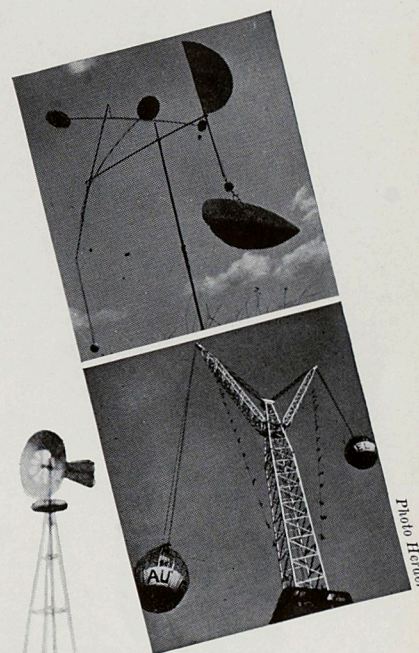
BY JAMES JOHNSON SWEENEY

The basis of graphic representation is a kinetic pleasure—the rhythmic gesture. The finger or pointed stick first recorded it in the sand, as chalk records the child's gesture on city pavements today. But our satisfaction at having achieved such a record soon crowds out all conscious recollection of the pleasurable sensation which underlies it. We quickly come to feel that our pleasure in regarding such a graph derives from some quality inherent in the linear organization itself rather than from kinetic experience of which it unconsciously reminds us.

Calder in introducing actual movement into his plastic organizations has given a new emphasis to the basic rhythmic gesture. This has had the fundamental value of a primitive appeal. And, it comes with Calder's work, at a moment when plastic expression is ripe for such a physical realization of movement.

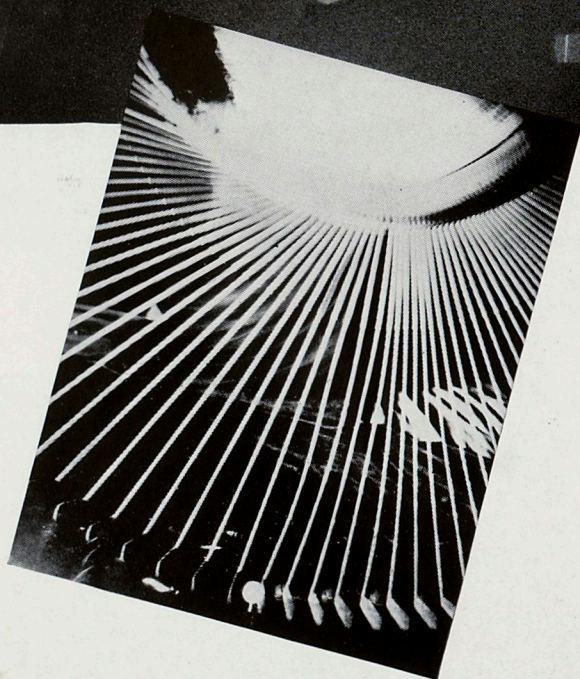
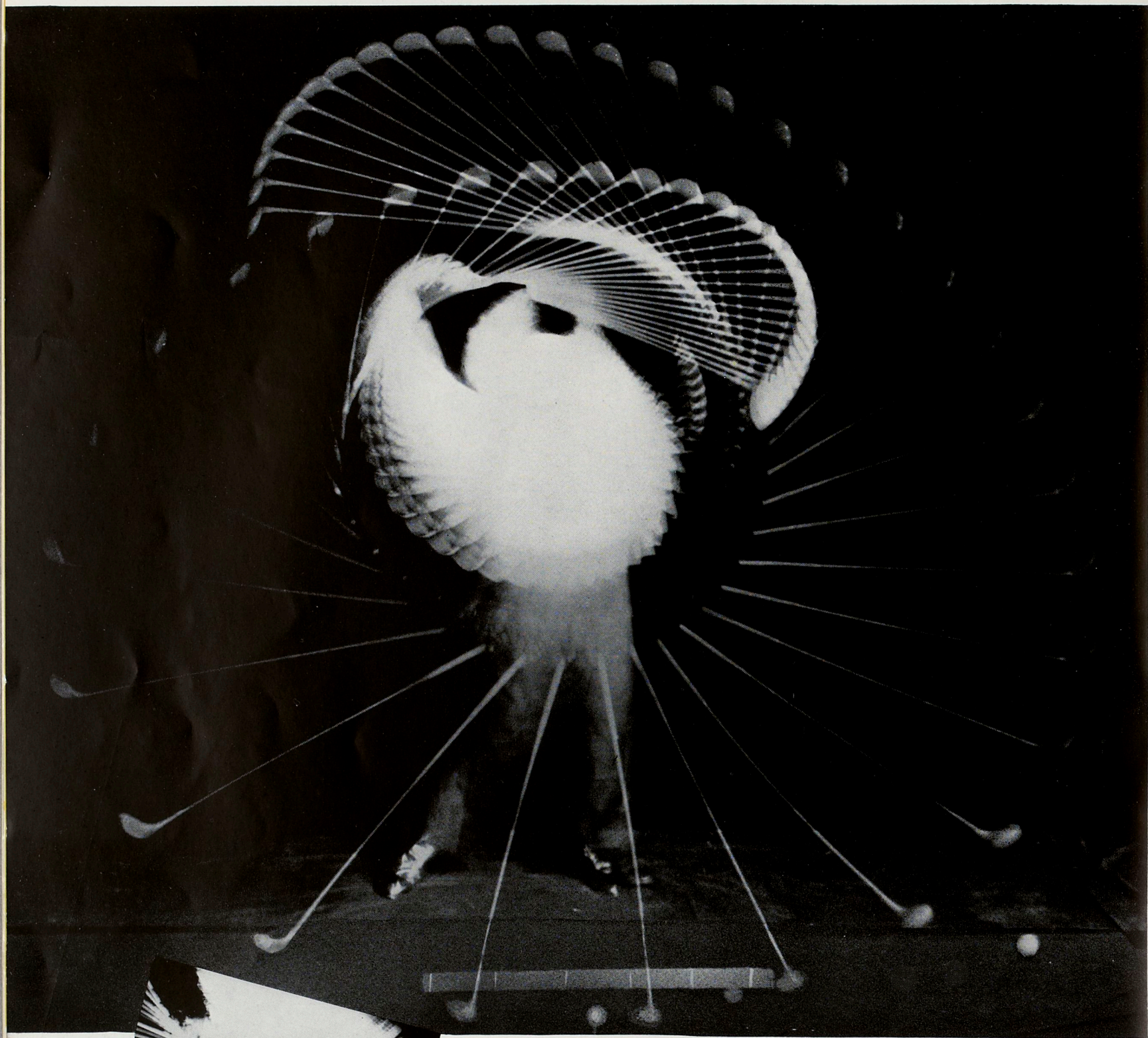
Since the close of the Renaissance the trend in plastic design has been away from the suggestion of fixity to one of mobility. The closed, symmetrical form has given way to an open asymmetrical one. The mathematical conventions of a strict perspective-approach have yielded slowly to a free, harmonic ordering of the picture-surface primarily dependent on the individual artist's sensibility. The single fixed viewpoint dominating the geometrical landscaping of a Lenotre was seen gradually to have resolved itself through Langley, Brown and Repton to a multiplicity of viewpoints that grew out of the wandering paths of late continental versions of "English" and "Chinese" gardens. While in architecture, as early as Schinkel and Nash, the formalistic stage-set character of the Baroque was turning to a free organic development of the building from within, on the basis of living requirements and in keeping with the demands of the natural surroundings in which the building was set. In short, the trend from the close of the Renaissance to the present day has been one of a growing interest in free natural rhythms and their adaptation to plastic expression.

It was only a step further for Calder to bring back actual movement in place of the suggestions of it. And the immediacy of this stimulus carried



Upper right: outdoor "mobile" by Alexander Calder. Giant Swing in the Paris Exposition of 1937 and wind mills at Chicago's Fair of 1893.

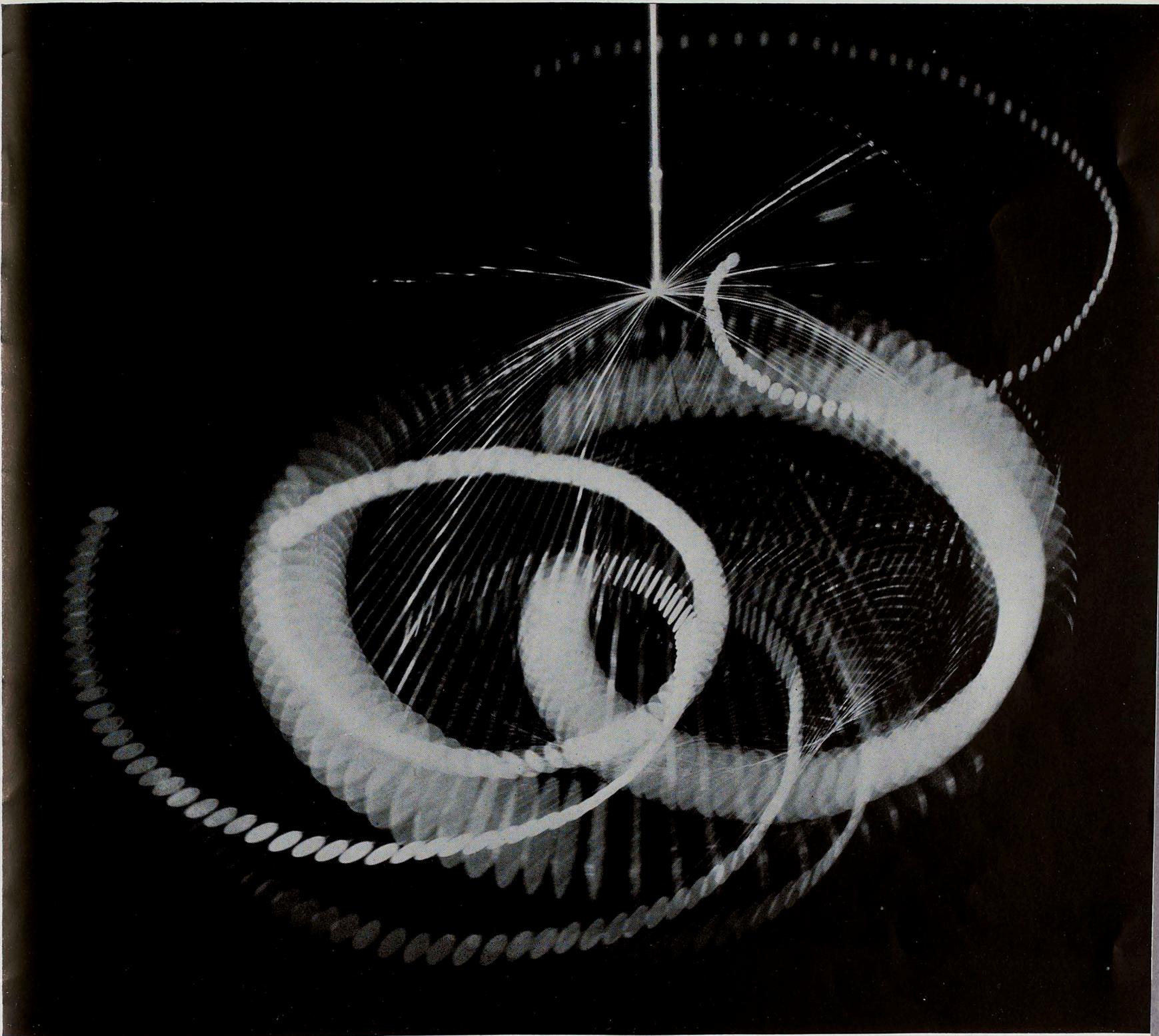




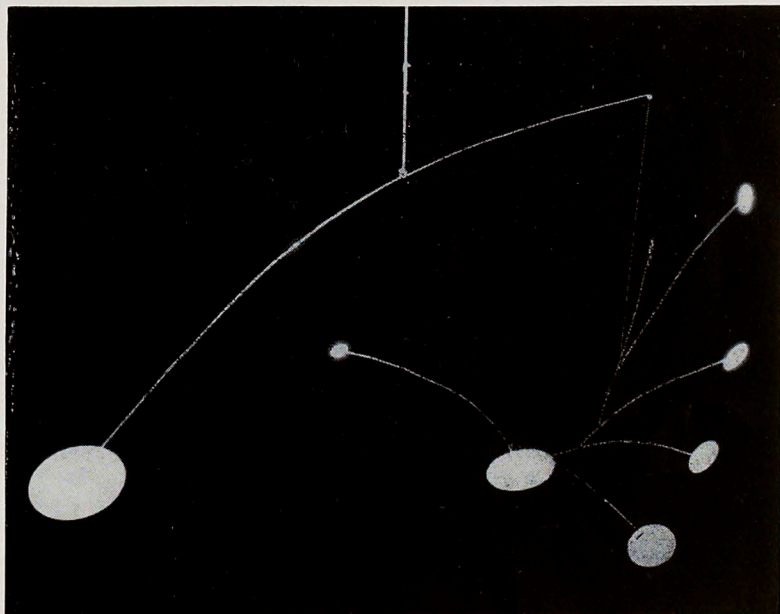
with it a primitive strength of rhythmic evocation that is perhaps Calder's most striking contribution. But a still more personal and perhaps more important one lies in his recognition of another feature of natural movements—their unpredictable character and the esthetic possibilities of the unexpected.

The Industrial period, which was ushered in almost contemporaneously with the Romantic Revival, provided a wealth of new materials and plastic possibilities through the development of the machine. But two factors militated





Right: Alexander Calder's "mobile 1939."  
 Above: same mobile in a revolving slow  
 motion; photographs by Herbert Matter.  
 Opposite page: a pattern created by a  
 golfer striking a ball. Multiple flash photo-  
 graph courtesy of Spalding Brothers,  
 Edgerton, Germeshausen and Grier pho-  
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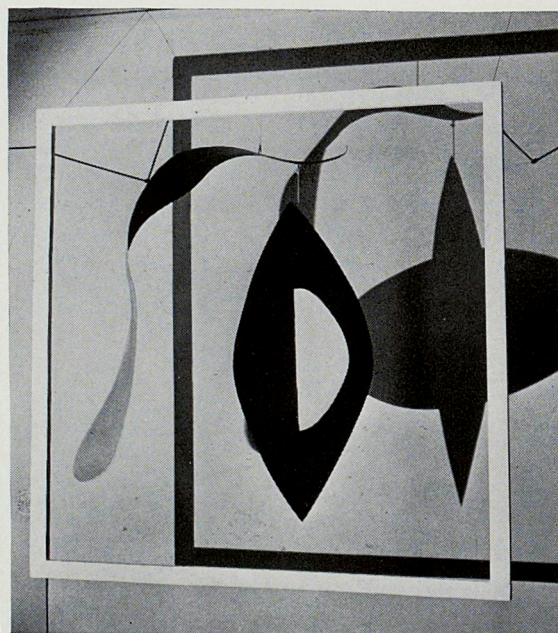
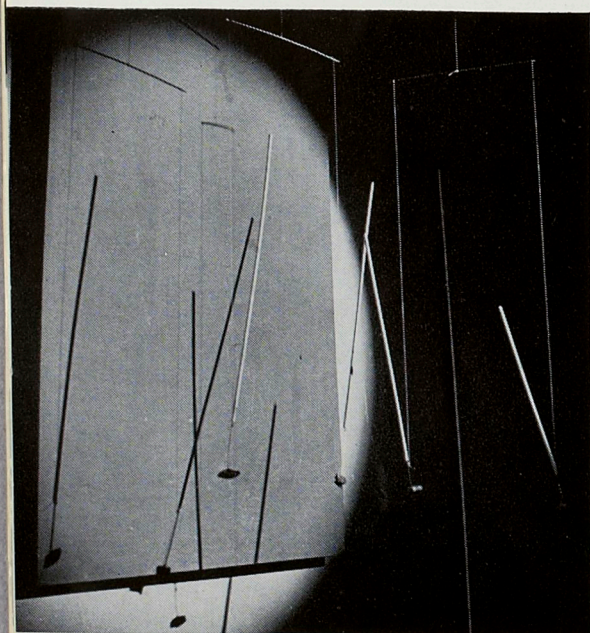
against a full use of the opportunities presented. On one hand the complacency of the Victorian world led it to feel it could improve on pre-industrial period expressions with the tools and the materials of the Industrial Age. The result was an ugly parody which caused a sensitive revulsion from the machine to a pre-Raphaelite escapism. But such a retreat into the past naturally called up a protest. And shortly after the opening of the present century we had a sentimentalization of the machine.

New materials, new forms, unlimited possibilities opened up toward a new plastic idiom were clearly recognized; but the romantic adulation of the machine which was felt necessary to offset the hostility of the previous generation made an honest plastic approach, for the time, next to impossible.

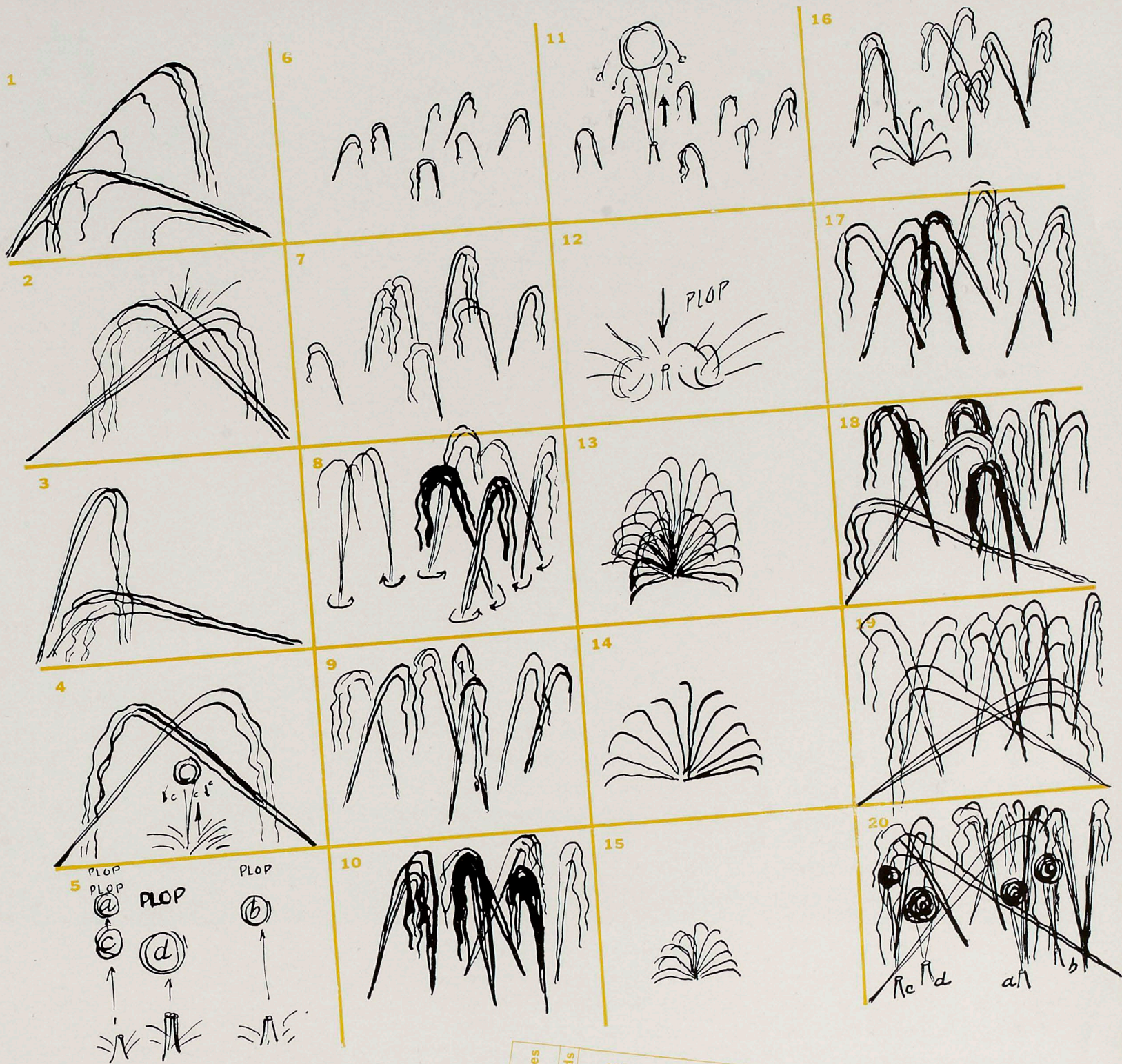
It was here that Calder's recognition of the potentialities of the surprise-factor in free rhythms and his ingenious, yet unaffected use of it served at once as a tonic and purge. The critics of the Romantic movement had been attracted to the unpredictable features of nature and had rediscovered through them the esthetic of the unexpected. Calder in adapting the natural rhythms also recognized the dramatic value of the surprise element. And his extremely personal use of it has probably done more than anything else toward combatting the fustian seriousness and lack of sense of humor that grew out of the sentimentalization of the machine, and toward laying a sound foundation for a new machine age idiom.

And in Calder's work these are by no means recent developments. Throughout, we see both these features constantly present: on one hand, the movement-through-space, as clearly represented by his tiny Aesop illustrations as by the skywriting of an airplane; on the other, a readiness to accept a hint from the nature of the material itself toward an unexpected rhythm or effect, now a tree root that becomes a curiously distorted representation of a cow, now a figure drawing that takes on an unfamiliarity from his use of an unbroken line. In his wire caricatures we see a similar approach to that of the Aesop illustrations. And in the later mobiles the unexpected rhythmic turn may again be derived directly from nature in a puff of wind that tosses the arms of the object, or from a mechanical rhythm produced by some twist in a wire or idiosyncrasy of the material.

In Calder's mobiles we have the tonic which clears away the sentimental approach to the machine, and lays a new stress on the rhythmic fundament of design through a physical representation of movement.



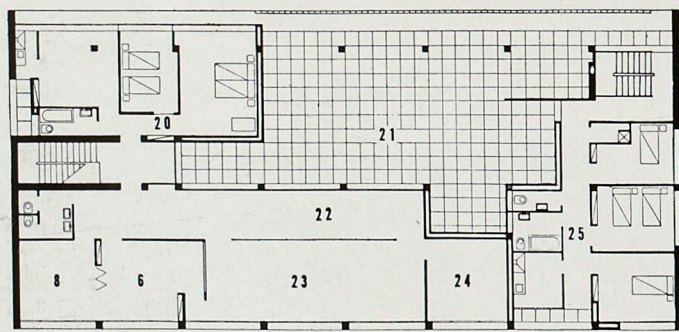




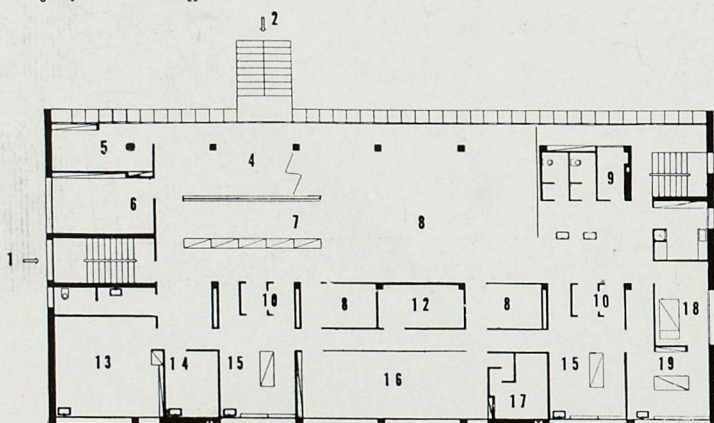
minutes	seconds	sprays			water bombs				water ballet							
		1	2	3	11	12	13	14	21	22	23	24	25	26	27	
1	10															
2	10															
3	10															
4	10															
5	10															

Water Ballet designed by Alexander Calder for the pool of the Consolidated Edison Building at the New York World's Fair. Above sequence of the twenty drawings illustrates the five consecutive scenes of the ballet. The effect is obtained by the play of fourteen nozzles controlled by timing devices. Right: time schedule of water play.

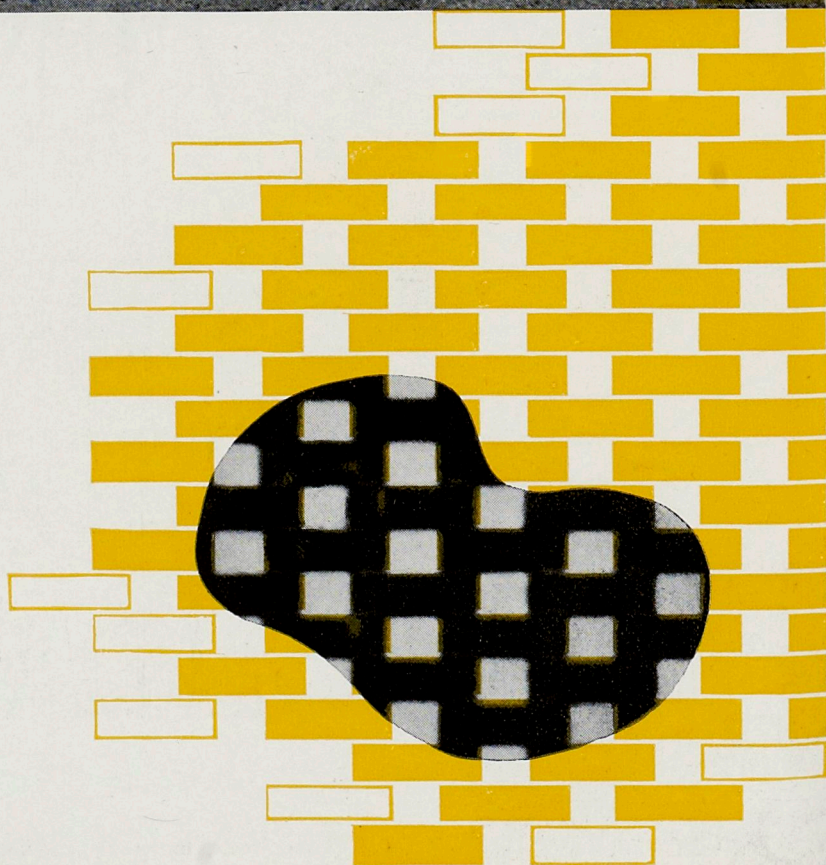




2nd



1st

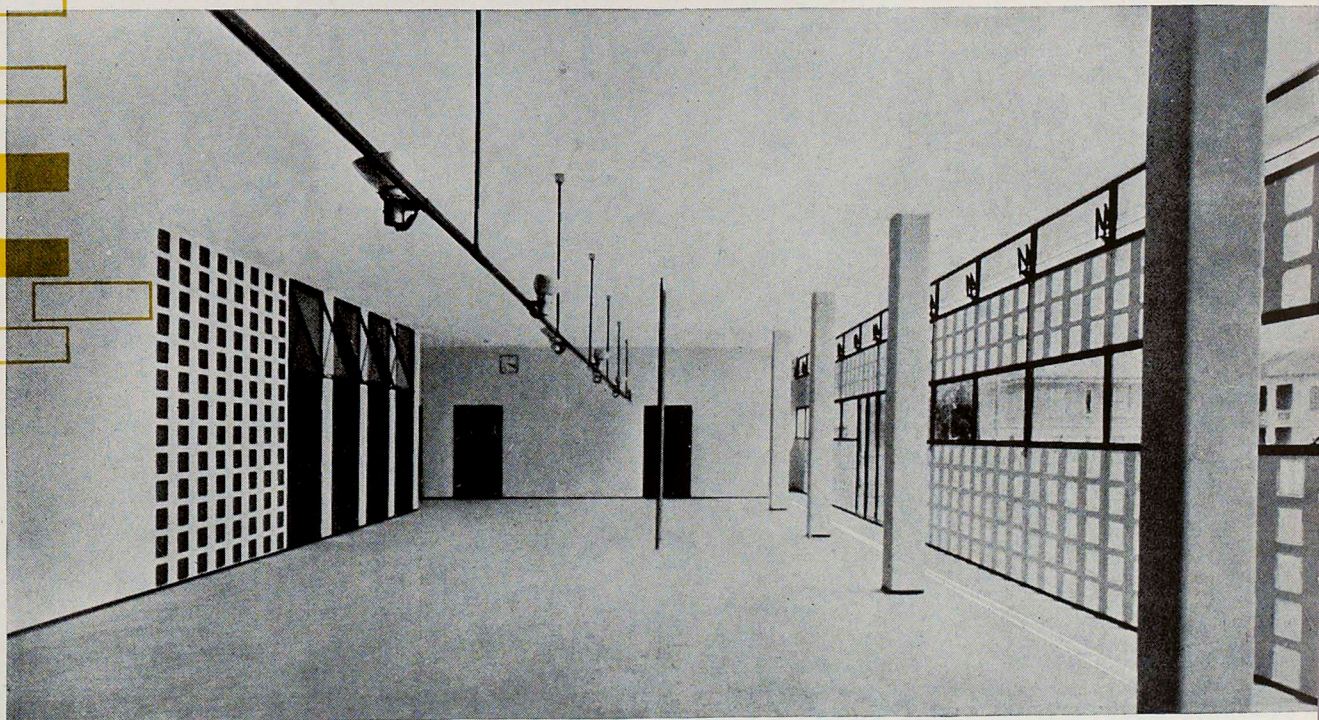
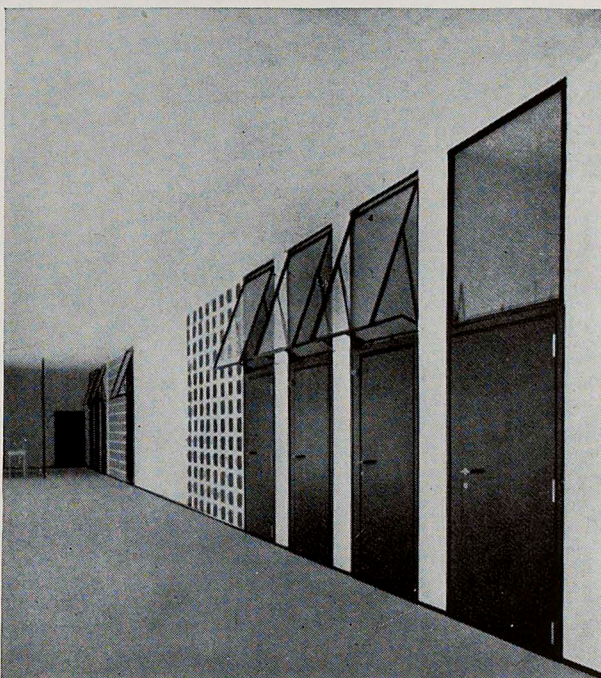
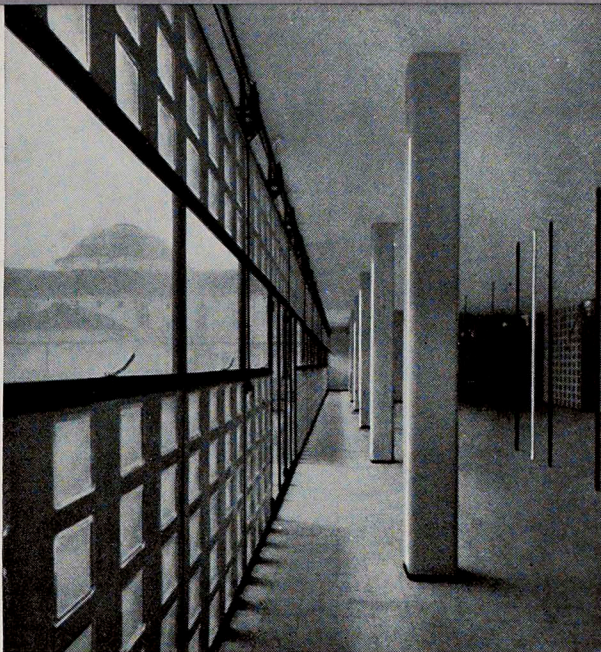




## TUBERCULOSIS CLINIC DESIGNED

BY I. GARDELLA AND L. MARTINI

Built by the province of Alexandria to provide facilities for the examination and treatment of patients and to house the antituberculosis service. The structure is reinforced concrete; heating, by radiating panels located in floors and ceilings; curtain wall of the south elevation, of white thermolux. The exterior walls are light yellow, the set-backs, blue, the screen of the solarium, made of bricks with white joints. Floors are of white terrazzo, interior walls are light blue and ceilings white. Ground floor plan: 1 Entrance to the social service administration. 2 Patients' entrance. 3 Service entrance. 4 Vestibule. 5 Visiting health service. 6 Director. 7 Reception. 8 Waiting room. 9 Supplies. 10 Dressing rooms. 12 Fluoroscopy. 13 Laboratory. 14 Dark room for throat examination. 15 Examining rooms. 16 Radiography. 17 Dark Room. 18 Rest room. 19 Pneumothorax. Second Floor: 20 Janitor's apartment. 21 Solarium. 22 Corridor. 23 Social service. 24 Archives. 25 Patients' rooms.

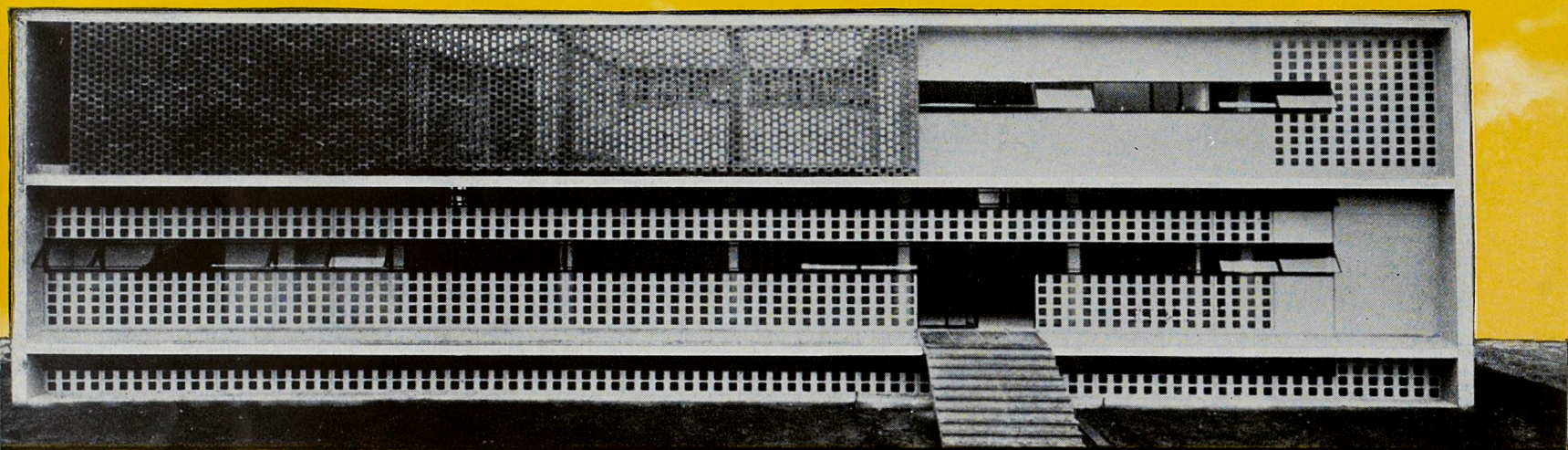


Left: the solarium. Above: interior views of clinic.





south elevation

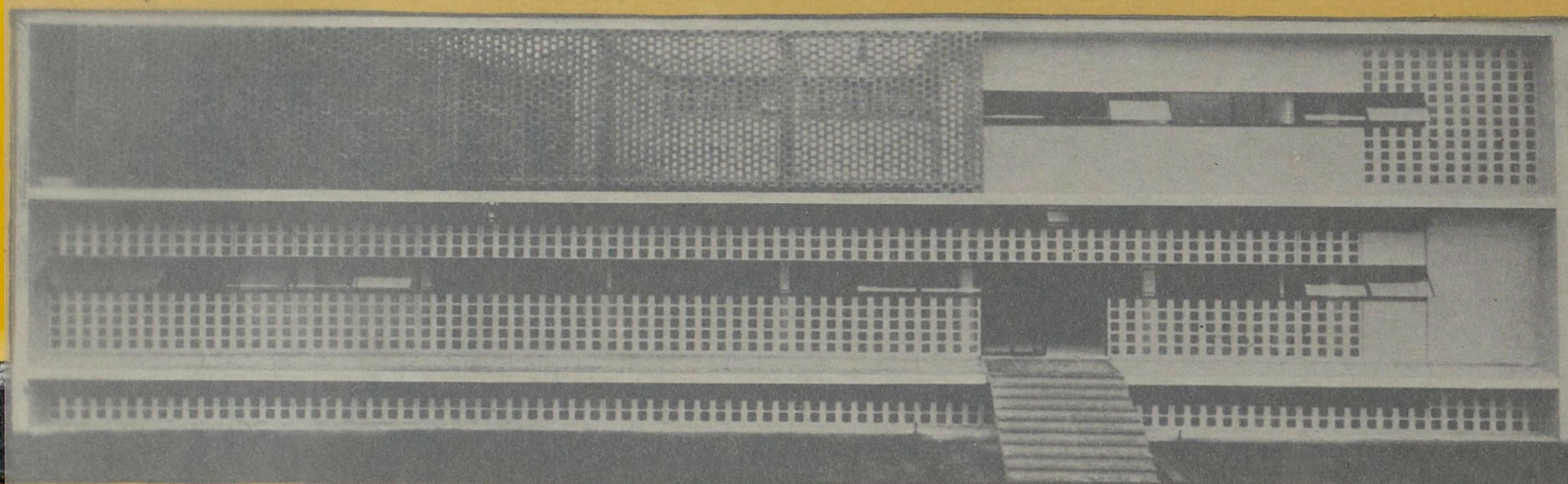


north elevation





south elevation  
↓



# plus

orientations of contemporary architecture

north elevation  
↓

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