

BAUHAUS

Exhibition

"MODERNISTIC" AND "STREAMLINED"

The reception of the Bauhaus exhibition has been interesting. The opening for members on Tuesday evening, December 6, was so crowded that it was difficult to get a fair impression of the show. Attendance records for the temporary quarters in Rockefeller Center were broken.

Most of the critics have realized the great historical importance of the Bauhaus in the different fields of modern art and, above all, its extraordinary influence on industrial design. But many of them, primarily critics of painting and sculpture, have credited it with parenthood of things which it would be the first to disclaim—"modernistic decoration," "modernistic chairs" and "the streamlined fixtures in banks." We are told that the Bauhaus was "a major source of the streamlined vision" and that "everything from the streamlined paper drinking cup and fountain pen to the buildings of the New York World's Fair is the result of this movement."

These confusions are worth analysing.

"Modernistic" is a word which should have a special and limited meaning, but is carelessly used by nearly everyone (except, of course, members of the Museum of Modern Art). It should mean **pseudo-modern**. "-istic" added to an adjective means "in the manner of" or "in imitation of the style of."

Modernistic is to modern as **archaistic** is to archaic. Archaic sculpture is **archaic** sculpture, the product of artists working in the normal honest style of an archaic period, as for instance, Greek sculpture of the sixth century B. C. **Archaistic** sculpture is pseudo-archaic sculpture, the product of artists aping the stylistic traits of a genuinely archaic period, as for instance, Roman sculptors who turned out modish figures in travesty of the archaic Greek style.

Modernistic, then, should apply to works which imitate superficially the forms of **modern**

art, reducing them to decorative mannerisms. "Modernistic decoration" accurately describes the cubistic mirrors of the Shoe Shoppes but not the forms of typical Bauhaus objects* which were the honest result of a study of their function, the material they were made of and the process by which they were manufactured. **Modernistic** is too valuable a word to be sacrificed as a sloppy substitute for **modern**.

The Bauhaus had almost nothing to do with streamlining, for it was not ordinarily engaged in designing objects which had to move efficiently at high speed.

Streamlining means exactly what one would think, the smoothing down of the form of an object, levelling the bumps and hollows until a shape is achieved which suggests a bullet, tear drop or one of the simpler fishes. It was developed in the design of planes and racing automobiles and boats, in order that delay due to surface friction might be reduced and speed, consequently, increased. For this purpose streamlining was a real advantage. The resulting forms were interesting and seemed new. Industrial designers, engaged in "re-styling" almost everything, so that what we owned might look old fashioned as soon as possible, seized upon these forms and misapplied them to a fantastic variety of objects. Streamlined paper cups, if dropped, would fall with less wind-resistance; they are no better than the old ones for the purpose for which they are actually intended, namely, drinking. The Bauhaus was closed about the time the streamline mania began, but it would have rejected the streamlined form for objects such as cocktail shakers and fountain pens where its use is nonsense.

Typical Bauhaus designs, whether for chairs, lighting fixtures or ash trays, are free of both modernistic and streamlined aberrations; sound

*"Modernistic" can however be applied with reason to many Bauhaus objects designed during the first few years of trial and error at Weimar in the early 'twenties.—Ed.

Bauhaus training would not permit them.

After its first few experimental years the Bauhaus achieved forthright modern forms which were the result of four important factors:

(1) The form of the object is determined by its **use**. A chair is something to sit in; the designer of a chair would begin by studying **sitting**—the different postures for dining or reading, postures conditioned, too, by the clothes of today.

(2) The form is also influenced by the **material**. Metal and wood have very different properties of strength and flexibility; they are not naturally used in the same way; a wood chair should not take the form of a tubular steel chair.

(3) The form is the result of some **process of manufacture**. Certain forms are the natural result of bending and would be unnatural and difficult to effect by cutting. One process will be efficient in mass production, another extravagant. The finished product will have the character of the process used in making it.

(4) The finished form is the **creation** of the designer. From a variety of forms, materials and processes of manufacture which may be equally practicable, he will choose those which his taste dictates and will combine them and perfect the results. His inventiveness and practical knowledge must be coordinated by his esthetic discipline if a distinguished design is to result. The final form will not be the result merely of fulfilling the exigencies of use, material and fabrication; it must have something more, intangible, but none the less real, something at home in the contemporary cultural climate, related to the generic forms used in the other arts.

The best Bauhaus objects show these qualities with singular directness. This is why few of them seem dated after a dozen years. They were never meant to be "in style" or "the last word of 1926," but were **honest** and often distinguished.

JOHN McANDREW

Curator of Architecture and Industrial Art

PRO AND CON IN THE NEW YORK PRESS

"You mustn't miss the new exhibition, Bauhaus 1919-1928."—*Cue*

"a forlorn gesture"—*Sun*

"convincing demonstration of wide scope and force of Bauhaus teachings"—*Retailing*

"an epitaph to the Bauhaus"—*Art News*

"a living idea continues to be oracular, even though the Bauhaus itself . . . has ceased to function."—*Times*

"clumsily installed"—*Sun*

"significant . . . for the excellent character of the presentation"—*Retailing*

"The survey is chaotic . . . disorganized promiscuity . . . the organizers might have conducted us (without recourse to that cheap sidewalk device of footprints painted on the floor)."—*Times*

"The show was installed by Herbert Bayer, one of the former masters of the Bauhaus. It comprises about 700 individual items. They fill all the museum's not too spacious galleries, and the very fact that the result is not confusing, that there are clarity, emphasis and drama in the arrangement (even the floors, traditionally not part of the exhibition, are decorated with painted guide lines, footprints and abstract forms which not only direct the visitor step by step through the exhibition, but bear artistic relation to the physical shape of each gallery and the type of objects displayed in it) exemplifies for one thing the effectiveness of Bauhaus principles of exhibition technique."—*World-Telegram*

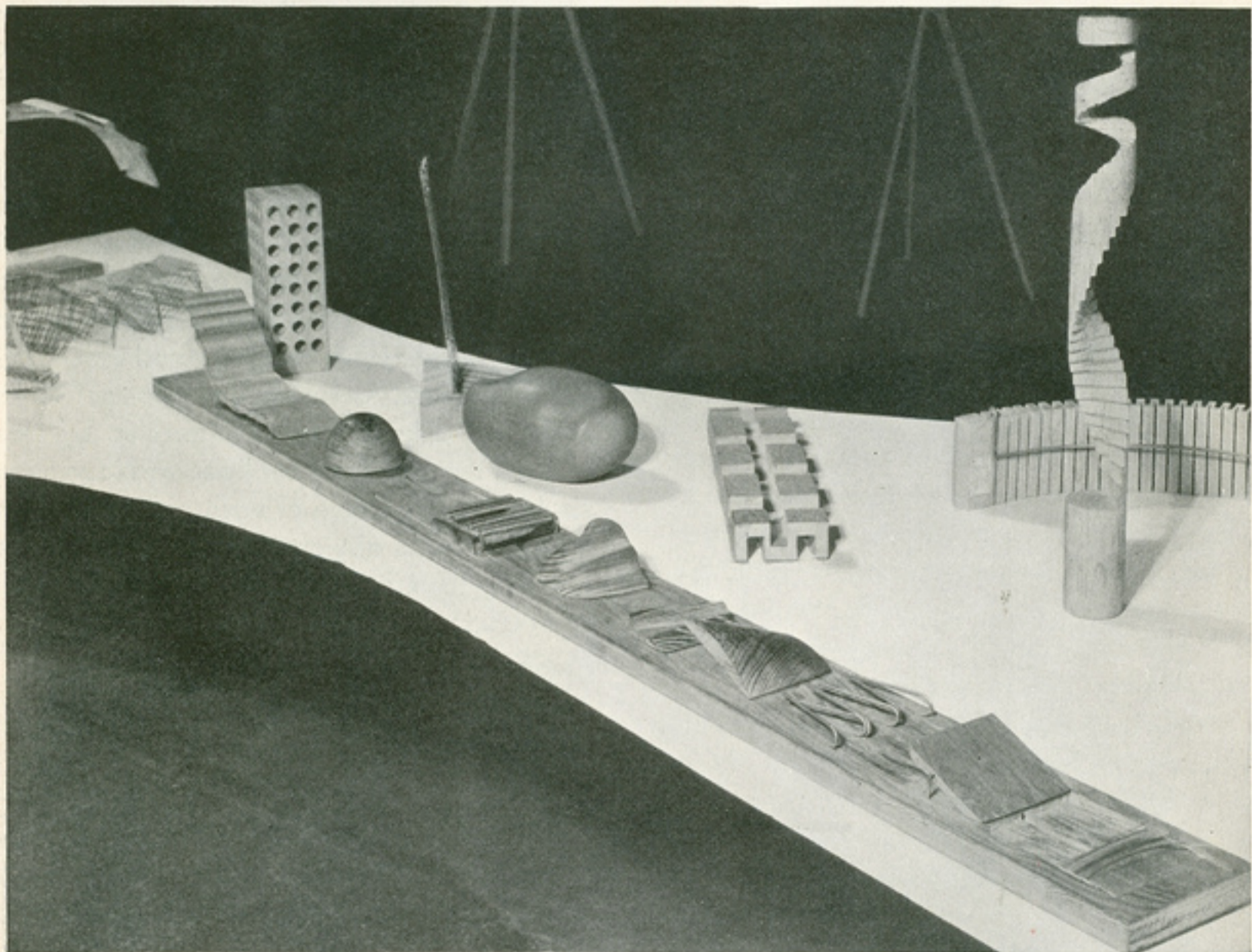
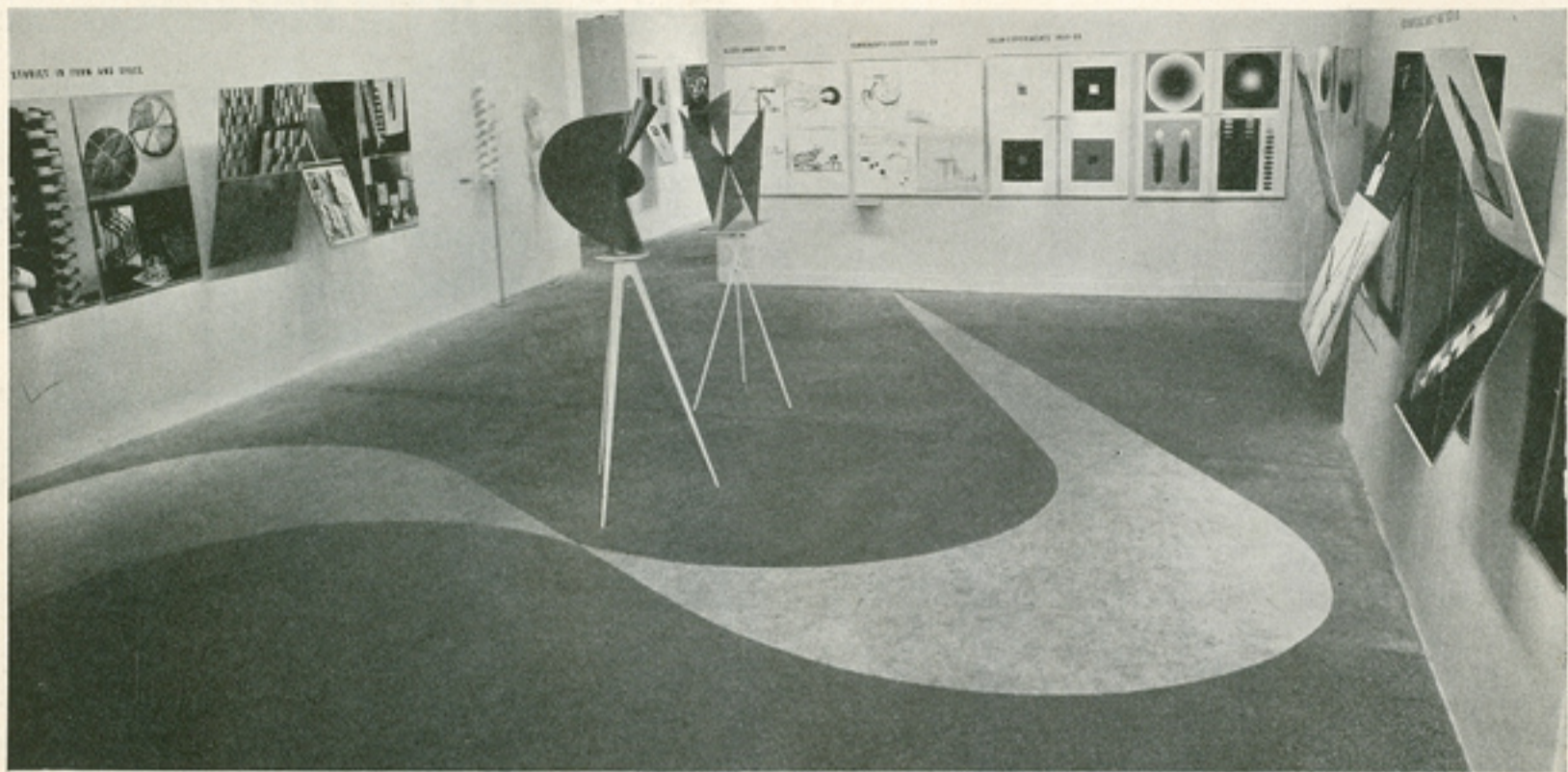
"magnificent textiles"—*Art News*

"unfortunate textiles"—*Sun*

"a final danse macabre"—*letter in the Times*

"finest thing in existence"—*letter in the Times*

"The Modern Museum has never better demonstrated its function as a laboratory for the analysis of latter-day experimentation."—*Herald Tribune*



The first room of the exhibit illustrates, for the most part, the work of students in the Preliminary Course of the Bauhaus, 1919-1928: investigation of the technical and esthetic properties of simple materials in connection with the study of abstract form and space design. At the left: Albers' classes; at the right: Moholy-Nagy's; in the center are constructions in galvanized iron.

Experimental constructions made by students in the Preliminary Course. The paper tower was made by slitting and folding a single rectangular sheet, without wasting any of the material. The construction at the left is made up of sheet iron parallelograms soldered together and adroitly balanced.



Small painting gallery, with *The Bauhaus Stairs* by the Bauhaus master, Oskar Schlemmer, 1929, lent to the exhibition by Philip Johnson.



Experiments in the technical and tactile properties of wood. The long object at the front is to be stroked from right to left for a varied sequence of tactile experiences—a small "scenic railway" for the finger tips. (Work of the New Bauhaus, Chicago, 1937-38)

One of the most influential fields of design at the Bauhaus was that of lighting fixtures. Many in common use today stem from these pioneer student works. (Bauhaus Metal Workshop)

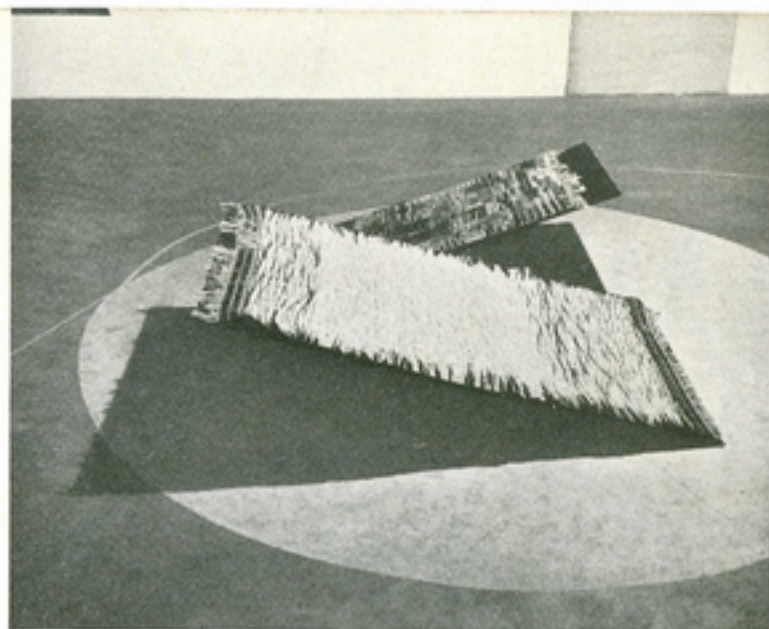




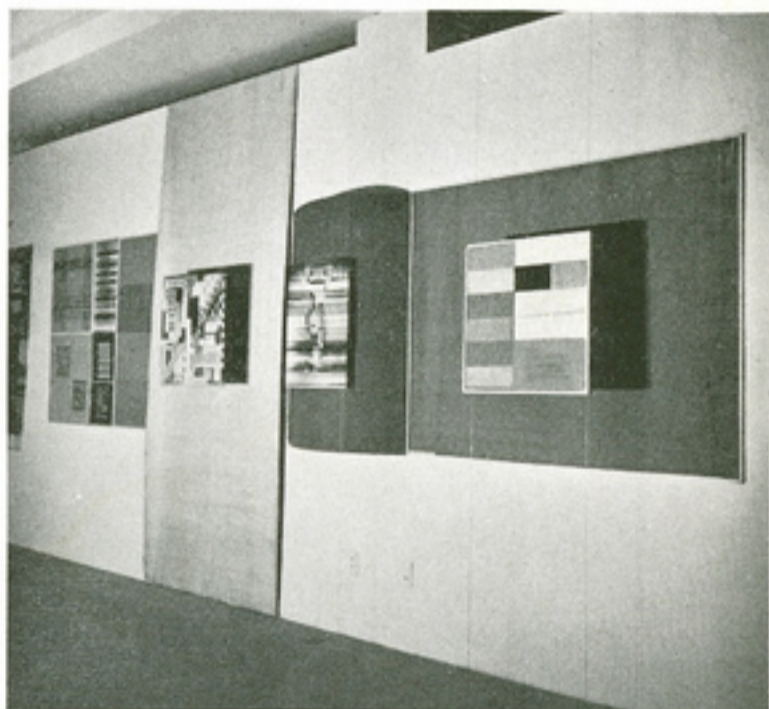
Herbert Bayer, who assembled and installed most of the exhibition looking through the peephole at the revolving dummies wearing Schlemmer's *Triadic Ballet* costumes, one of which is shown in the photograph at the right.

The painting on the floor is more than a decoration, for it guides the visitor through the whole exhibition in the proper order.

Installation of Bauhaus rugs. (Bauhaus Weaving Workshop)



Samples from the Weaving Workshop, including woven horsehair and wall coverings of woven cellophane with special acoustic properties.



The chair in the center (also large photograph above it) is an important *monument historique* of modern furniture for it is the first chair of metal tubing. It was designed in 1925 by Marcel Breuer who had been a student at the Bauhaus since 1920. Already its descendants are incalculable in number and variety. Foreground: vitrines with objects from the Metal Workshop.

Typography: posters, bookjackets and alphabet rationalized to very simple forms.



The Bauhaus was fertile in imaginative innovations in photography.



Photographs of work from the Sculpture Workshop. Some of the photographs are applied to the wall, others are hung in front of it by fine wires.



The Bauhaus pedagogical idea in America: work done at the Laboratory School for Industrial Design in New York.



Work done at Black Mountain College, North Carolina, under the direction of former Bauhaus masters.



Frank Lloyd Wright, Professor Gropius and Mrs. Gropius at the members' opening.



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