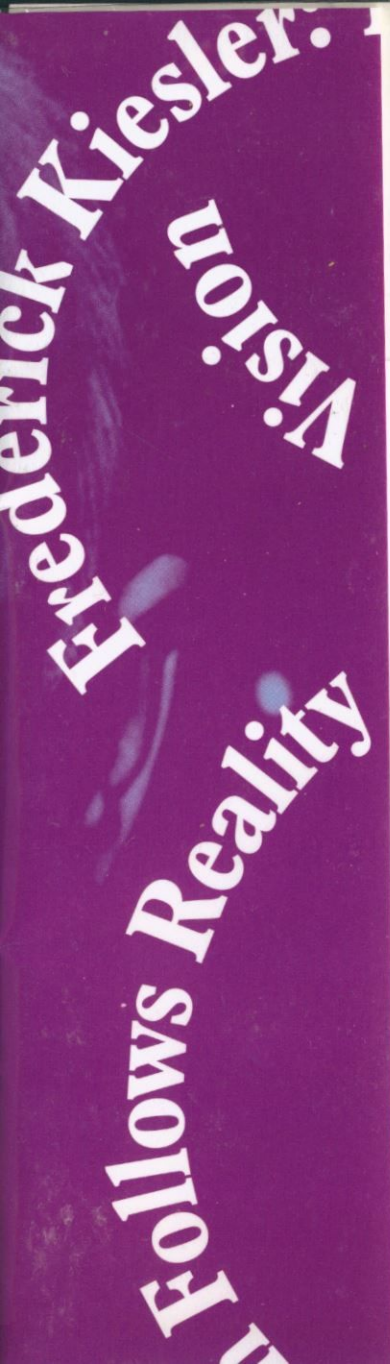




# Function Follows Vision

# Vision Follows Reality

Frederick Kiesler

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# Die Ausstellung als Medium

Friedrich Kiesler war Bühnenbildner, Architekt, Ausstellungsgestalter, Künstler und Designer. Zahlreiche seiner Projekte verbinden die verschiedenen Disziplinen. Insbesondere seine Entwürfe für nicht realisierte Ausstellungsdisplays sind ihrer Zeit weit voraus und denken Präsentationsmodalitäten von Kunst in Hinblick auf das Verhältnis von Kunst und Betrachter, Kunst und Gesellschaft radikal neu.

In Bezug auf die Präsentation zeitgenössischer Kunst interessierte sich Kiesler insbesondere für die Ermöglichung von Präsenz innerhalb einer Ausstellung. Wie organisiert man eine dynamische Beziehung zwischen Kunstwerk, Betrachter und dem Gang durch die Ausstellung? Wie aktiviert man Bewegung im Raum als integralen Bestandteil der Ausstellung selbst? Kiesler brachte nicht nur die beiden gegensätzlichen Kunstströmungen seiner Zeit, den Konstruktivismus und den Surrealismus, zusammen, sondern verschrieb sich auch deren gemeinsamem Ziel, Kunst und Leben einander anzunähern. Sein Ziel war entsprechend, nicht nur eine Bühne zu etablieren, sondern ein Raumgefühl für eine Ausstellung zu schaffen, das eine nie zuvor erlebte Unmittelbarkeit in der Begegnung zwischen Betrachter und Kunstwerk möglich machte.

im Ausstellungsraum sind. Andere Künstler reagieren auf die Ideen Kieslers – „Farben und Formen sind das einfachste, das billigste, das rascheste Mittel, einen Raum visionär umzugestalten" – mit Interventionen, die die Idee der neutral gestalteten Ausstellung konterkarieren. Farben, Formen und Materialien verbinden sich dabei zu einer Inszenierung, die intuitiv argumentiert und dennoch Motive und Gestaltungsmaximen Kieslers sinnlich erfahrbar macht.

Als Architekt ist dieser Teil des internationalen Kanons, als Ausstellungsgestalter und Künstler wird er seit einigen Jahren intensiv rezipiert. In diesem Sinne soll die vorliegende Publikation auch dazu dienen, seine noch immer überaus aktuellen Ideen weiter bekannt zu machen.

Luca Lo Pinto
Vanessa Joan Müller





# The Exhibition as Medium

Friedrich Kiesler was an architect, artist, and designer whose work encompassed a wide range of projects, from stage and exhibition to furniture design, in many instances combining these different disciplines. His designs for unrealized exhibition displays are especially far ahead of their time, radically rethinking the presentation modalities of art within the scope of the relationship between art and the observer, and art and society. How does one organize a dynamic relationship between the artwork, the observer and the path through the exhibition? How does one activate movement within the space as an integral component of the exhibition itself? Kiesler not only brought together the two contrasting art movements of his time, namely Constructivism and Surrealism, but also adopted their common objective—the goal of bringing art and life closer together. Accordingly, it was his aspiration to not only establish a representative stage for art, but to also create a sense of space within the exhibition that enabled an immediacy never before experienced in the encounter between the observer, and the work.

A large part of Kiesler's oeuvre was dedicated to the design of stage sets and exhibition displays, while also being characterized by his reflections on the presentation of products in storefront window

displays. All of these projects can be understood as a rejection of the traditional framework, insofar as that framework serves to create barriers between different systems of representation. The objective then becomes the lifting of these barriers to allow for a co-presence, which Kiesler dubbed Correalism. He saw the frame as an indication of the artificial duality of image and environment. In his early displays, Kiesler borrowed from constructivism and neo-plasticism's abstract spatial vectors to circumvent the definitions and boundaries created by concepts such as scale, medium and meaning. In 1924, Kiesler organized the *International Exhibition of New Theatre Techniques* as part of the Music and Theater Festival of the City of Vienna, where he designed and created his famous L+T (storage and carrier) system, a flexible and freestanding construction for the presentation of objects, and paintings.

Later, under the motto "Dramatizing the merchandise," Kiesler's window display designs for the Saks Fifth Avenue department store in New York took ideas concerning stage design and the presentation of contemporary art and conferred them onto the world of products and commodities. In his *Contemporary Art Applied* publication, Kiesler used the experience of staging selected items of clothing in a presentation space visible to the general public—the display window—as grounds from which to further develop concepts, and ideas on contemporary product presentation. The fact that he also saw this as a way to prepare the broader public for encounters with contemporary art speaks for his pioneering approach, which was very much influenced by the art of his time.

Kiesler was able to formulate and further develop his reflections on what we now call display more comprehensively in 1942, when New York art





collector Peggy Guggenheim commissioned him to design an exhibition space for her collection of abstract and surrealistic art: "Art of This Century." The exhibition space was made up of four different galleries—the abstract, the Surrealist, the kinetic gallery, and the "Daylight Gallery." The abstract, Surrealist, and kinetic galleries presented the collection that Guggenheim had acquired in Europe through the help of the curator Herbert Read and Marcel Duchamp. The Daylight Gallery was used for temporary, changing exhibitions that took place between 1942 and 1949. The abstract gallery was in the entrance area and featured lightly undulating, wave-shaped walls made from blue canvas with the floors also painted blue. All of the paintings were hung either from the ceiling on v-shaped rope constructions or were fixed to pyramid-shaped constructions. Selected sculptures were also integrated into these modules. As in the other gallery rooms, furniture designed by Kiesler served as both easels for the paintings or pedestals for the sculptures. The Surrealist gallery, on the other hand, was a long room completely paneled with concave, arched wooden modules onto which the paintings were mounted. In the original presentation, the works were individually lit by spot lights which were set to go on, and off at random. Occasionally, the gallery would be immersed in complete darkness, accompanied by the sounds of an approaching train.

One of the most striking elements in "Art of This Century" was the display system, which had the exhibited paintings hanging exclusively without frames, not on the wall, but on metal constructions from which the paintings were projected into the space. This system allowed for the transposition of the paintings into an indifferent status: they were

given the status of objects without actually being objects in the stricter sense. The artworks seemed to float in the room with the observer being able to tilt them through the application of movable hinges. Within the setting of Guggenheim's private museum, its atmosphere slightly reminiscent of a luxurious sitting room, the artworks became agents of differentiated networks of relations between the works and space, space and the observer. The material and immaterial came together in an exhibition which functioned as a medium, allowing the visitors to see themselves not only as observers, but as active subjects entering into a dialogue with the works, and in doing so, themselves temporarily becoming part of the exhibit. Kiesler's design was therefore striving for nothing less than a dynamic interaction between presentation, reception, and authorship in a time when the white cube had not yet asserted itself as the dominant form.

This publication brings together a small selection of Kiesler's texts on exhibition design and display. Equal parts pragmatic and idealistic in their approach to questions of design, they are both instructional and visionary in nature. Though always related to specific practical questions, and issues, they hint at horizons far beyond traditional ways of thinking.

This selection of texts is being published in accompaniment of the "Function Follows Vision, Vision Follows Reality" exhibition in the Kunsthalle Wien, which takes approaches in contemporary art and places them in a dialogue with selected drawings by Kiesler, thereby utilizing an atmospheric setting to translate ideas of the visionary designer into the present. Francesco Pedraglio, for example, transforms Kiesler's writings on window displays into an abstract dialogue which is presented in the





exhibition space as an audio piece centered on the subject of (picture) frames. Céline Condorelli's *Swindelier* combines Kiesler's central design elements with a fan and a shifting light environment within the room to create a type of sculptural portrait of Kiesler himself. Annette Kelm's still life photography meets the still lifes of garments arranged by Kiesler for the window display of the Saks Fifth Avenue department store in New York in 1930. Leonor Antunes's film *String Travel* picks up on a theme from the avant-garde film *The Witch's Cradle* by Maya Deren, which she shot on location at the "Art of This Century" museum in 1942. Notations by the composer Morton Feldman, a close friend of Kiesler, have the appearance of minimalist drawings due to their abstraction, but are actually instructions for the performance of pieces of music—just as Kiesler's abstract drawings are proposals for the activation of the viewer within the exhibition space. Other artists take Kiesler's idea that "colors and forms are the simplest, cheapest and fastest means of transforming a room in a visionary fashion" and respond with interventions that counteract the idea of a neutrally designed exhibition space. Colors, forms, and materials come together in an insinuation that is both intuitively reasoned, while simultaneously also providing a sensual experience of Kiesler's main motives, and design principles.

As an architect, Kiesler has his place in the international canon, and his role as an exhibition designer and artist has been honored for some years. This publication therefore also serves to draw on his ideas, which remain incredibly relevant to this day, and emphazise their potential as a source of inspiration.

Luca Lo Pinto
Vanessa Joan Müller

# Frederick Kiesler: Function Follows Vision Vision Follows Reality*

* *Form doesn't follow function. Form follows vision, vision follows reality.*

Underwood & Underwood

Friedrich Kiesler bei seiner Ankunft in New York, 1926

*Frederick Kiesler on his arrival in New York, 1926*



# Contemporary Art Reached the Masses through the Store

The department store at home was the true introducer of modernism to the public at large. It revealed contemporary art to American commerce.

First, as a new style in textile design for woman's fashions.

Second, as a means of show window decoration.

Third, the store decoration, and expositions.

And finally, entering the home through interior decoration, modern art is becoming a lasting contribution to a new outlook on life.

The department store acted as the interpreter for the populace of a new spirit in art.

Here was an art gaining acceptance not through slow fostering of its theories and principles in academies and art schools, but simply by planting its creations down in the commercial marts. In Europe the process was reversed. The ideals and motivating spirit of the new school gradually gained an understanding among the people as the artists themselves strengthened their ideas and laid the foundation for a permanent new style. First came the artist and his theory, then a slow evolution and a general acceptance. Here we received the finished product but had no background to enable us to discriminate, and to evaluate it.

The Neward Museum had held two small expositions, the first in 1912, but they had drawn comparatively little attention, just as the early strivings of Paul T. Frankl, and Josef Urban, in New York, met with little reward.

In 1927 R. H. Macy & Co., Inc., staged the first representative exposition of modern interior decoration in America. In 1928, through Saks Fifth Avenue, the public saw the first extensive presentation of modern show windows, which I was so fortunate as to be called upon to design. By showing at one time fourteen such windows, the store did much to spread popular appreciation of the contemporary style in decoration, and architecture. In 1928, too, Lord & Taylor staged an impressive exhibition of French decorative art.

These three institutions brought the contemporary industrial art of Europe to the knowledge of the general public. Not only New Yorkers, but hundreds of thousands from all parts of the country viewed the expositions. Newspapers carried reports. Controversies arose. Wherever a newspaper was opened, in the remotest villages, the syndicated reports of the sensational novelty brought a knowledge of the coming revolution in taste.

We are gradually approaching the solution of a nation's most profound cultural problem, an art of its own.

But we must not be too impatient. The new American style of art is evolving out of the chaos of older styles of other lands.





## THE NEW ART IS FOR THE MASSES

If ever a country has had the chance to create an art for its people, through its people, not through individuals, and handicraft, but through machine mass production, that country is America today.

It will be adaptation and rebirth.

It will be American.

## THAT IS: IT WILL BE OF THE MACHINE

The expression of America is the mass, and the expression of the masses, the machine.

The machine is our greatest aid. The machine, not as Europe has understood it, but as America understands it today,

Not as a means of reproduction, but as a power for creative production.

The machine has until now been unable to develop its own creative power. It has been condemned to imitate medieval handiwork on a large scale.

Today we have not only revealed the creative possibilities of the machine, but we are also conscious of its limitations: it must function on a large scale.

The designer of today designs directly for the machine which translates his drawings into material, form, and function.

The artist is now separated from the execution of his design. He concerns himself no longer, as did the potter, the goldsmith, the weaver, with the materialization of his drawing; the machine has freed him from this task and does it more exactly, quickly, cheaply, and as beautifully.

Unprecedented though it may be in the annals of art, a main channel through which the new style will approach popularization is the store. Here is where

a new art can come into the closest contact with the stream of the mass, by employing the quickest working faculty: the eye.

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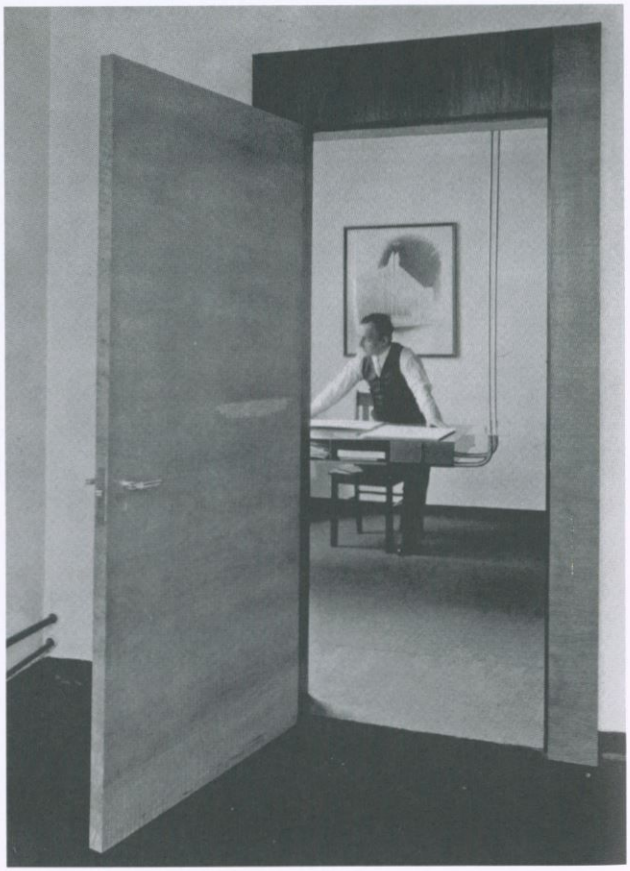

Unbekannter Fotograf; *unknown photographer*

Friedrich Kiesler an seinem Flying Desk, Anfang 1930er Jahre

*Frederick Kiesler at his Flying Desk, early 1930s*



# The Ideology of the Show Window

What interests us today is: How will the retail store look tomorrow? In what direction will its decoration and its sales policy develop? What will be modern tomorrow? On what can we rely?

Will there be a permanent style? Or is it more advisable to prepare for the future with temporary equipment?

These are vital questions in the commercial world today. Even decision taken at this moment is of significance for the future. Therefore, it is necessary for us to inquire as deeply as possible into the fundamentals, weighing both practical, and artistic considerations.

What was the "invention" of the show window of today?

The erection of a plate of glass between the merchandise and the passerby.

Until that decisive moment there had been only market halls or open booths. Show windows were superfluous. Commerce was freer, more intimate. One could touch, and handle what one proposed to buy.

Contact between street and store, between passerby, and merchandise; this is the function of the show window.

After the passerby has halted, the silent window has a duty: To talk. To demonstrate. To explain. In short: to sell.

How is this best accomplished? And how is it that virtually no shop, large or small, can exist today without show windows?

There was a time when there were no show windows. Yet merchandise sold just as easily—or just as poorly. Times when windows were utterly unnecessary, when the needed contact was established at once in market places and open stalls. Here were fixtures, merchandise, and reserve stocks collected in one place. Today all is split up; show windows, counters, stock.

Why?

This evolution had three compelling causes:

a) Expanded cities and new means of transportation

b) Mass production through the machine

c) Permanence of stores.

1. Expanded Cities and New Transportation

Is it possible to imagine an open market place for a million people?

It would in itself have to be as large as a city.

Distances from the home to the store are being shortened more and more by new means of transportation. This development has removed home from business, and has created separate shopping, and living centers.





2. Mass Production

Is it possible to imagine a merchant receiving, by train and plane, crates of merchandise long in advance of the time for selling them, and stocking them pell-mell around his tables?

This would surely not benefit his good. It would disturb him, take up costly space. Mass production demands adequate stock facilities.

3. Permanence of Stores

We can no longer expect to run down several flights every time the coalman, the milkman, the shoe, clothing or iceman cries his wares.

No, this kind of romance is gone. We reserve it for our vacation trips when we go "back to Nature" in Maine, Westchester, Corwall, Provence...

In the city, we must live the life of our times.

So the improvised mart of former times, which was held only on certain days and at certain hours for certain people, must give way to the permanent store of today. Everyone may now buy and sell when, and where he chooses.

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Unbekannter Fotograf; *unknown photographer*

Friedrich Kiesler mit einem Präsentationsmöbel einer Schaufenstergestaltung, ca. 1927/28

*Frederick Kiesler with a presentation device for a shop window display, ca. 1927/28*



# The Store Evolved from the Market

Since the first days of barter and commerce, there were window exhibits in the homes of the handicraft worker. These developed slowly into small private shops. What interests us here, however, is an evolution of the mammoth store of today, which was direct and simple. In the beginning there was the open market place. Later, steps were taken to protect it against wind and weather. A roof was put on, but as yet no walls. The roof had to be supported by columns and beams. So evolved both the so-called Tuchhalle and the market hall, the first for wholesale, and the second for retail trade.

They were really nothing more than covered market places. The market hall usually stood in the center of the town's main square. It was an intrinsic part of the municipal life. Near it clustered the church and the town hall.

It was the community's gathering place. The life of the town was concentrated to it, radiated from it.

As a rule the market hall was the property of the municipality, which subleased stalls to the various dealers.

## THE MARKET HALL DID NOT NEED SHOW WINDOWS

The market hall had no doors or windows. The entire structure was simply a roof upon pillars with open entrances between them.

If the entrances were walled up, a formal building would result.

On the other hand, one would immediately be compelled to break openings in the walls, and devise show windows, because the merchandise had a message for the public.

In the market halls, however, with their entrances on all sides, contact between consumer, and merchandise flowed on undisturbed. A show window there would have been sheer nonsense.

In these market halls were sold not only edibles and dry goods but practically everything from pins to paintings, just as in the department store of today. These market halls were virtually the forerunners of the mammoth stores of today.





## WE HAVE SEALED UP THE OPEN MARKET

What we have done, however, is in effect to seal our stores with walls, windows, and doors, against prospective consumers. And we are surprised that they do not stream in crowds. On the one hand we protect ourselves from the public, our patrons, as from robbers; on the other hand, we wish them to desire eagerly to enter.

And we are continuously trying to discover methods of getting them in.

(...)

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Unbekannter Fotograf; *unknown photographer*

Fredrick Kiesler, New York, 1933



# The Frame

## THE FRAME ACCEPTED AT PRESENT MAY BE DEVELOPED

The frame of the show window on the facade of the store is usually included in the building itself and therefore beyond the display manager's province.

Practically speaking, he is unable to make any changes here. Or he can make changes only at a heavy expenditure, and it would be up to the store management to decide whether or not to approve such an outlay.

These window frames are of heavy materials: stone, brick, concrete, metal, permanent constructions bound up in the scheme of the whole store front. This fact has restrained stores from thinking about changes here; but with new methods now being introduced into store architecture, store decoration, and show window display, our investigation can no longer stop at this point. New ideas may develop from it.

## THE WINDOW IS A FRAMED PICTURE

Let us assume the wall of the store front is of stone, marble, or stucco. The area which is left open for the

show window then usually receives a frame of metal to hold the plate of glass.

This metal frame usually is of steel or bronze. It has thus a purely functional purpose; but instead of leaving the emphasis on the purely functional it is often worked to resemble sculptured decoration. This metal border is like the frame of a picture. The display manager has to paint the picture for the public. His canvas is space, his pigments merchandise and decoration, his brushes light, and shadow.

There are two ways of making the frame of the plate glass a contributing feature of your show window:

1. Develop it into importance.
2. Omit it entirely.

## DEVELOPING THE WINDOW FRAME

One may install a real frame as if for a picture. This frame is to be substantially larger than customary today. It may jut out from the building line as much as five or six inches. It may vary from three to twelve inches in width.

The material that may be used are:

a) Hardwood, fireproofed, and lacquered (inexpensive).

b) Brass, weather protected (medium priced).

c) Duraluminum (expensive).

d) Brass, chromium nickel-plated, or bronze (expensive).

e) Glass–etched, opaque, or mirrored in colors (not too expensive if construction is correctly designed).

f) Marble or stone (expensive).





## DRAMATIZING THE LIGHTING

With any of these materials concealed lighting can be used to create an aura around the entire window, at the same time providing illumination for the sidewalk.

## "AURA–FRAMES"

The sidewalk may have an intarsia flooring in different colors, executed in cement, with inlays of metal or other materials that are brilliant enough to reflect the light. The sidewalk may also be of glass illuminated from below in such a manner as to focus attention on the entrance or the windows.

These "aura-frames," used in a series of show windows, can result in attractive rhythms of light along the whole building front. With the introduction of a monotone color used in a graduated intensity through the series, certain accents can be projected at desirable points. The whole psychological value of color can here be utilized.

Where opaque glass has been used for the "aura-frame" lettering may be placed behind it so that at night concealed lighting can bring the announcement into prominence.

You may connect an electrical clock to the lighting system of the window frame. Light would flash on and off at determined intervals. This promotes the window frame from a decorative accessory into an advertisement medium.

It is of course extremely difficult to proffer suggestions of completely new ideas that will be custom-made and fit everybody everywhere. Broadway requires different treatment from Washington's F Street.

## OMITTING THE FRAME

A much wider latitude for new ideas is present in conceiving show windows for buildings still to be constructed. Reconstructions and alterations usually offer many more difficulties to the designer. They hamper him and often are more expensive than the devising of completely new fronts.

In the coming architecture, and even in decoration, everything which does not serve a function can be omitted.

In our case it would mean entirely omitting the metal frame, because prevision could be made in the wall itself for holding the window glass, or for reducing the frame to a minimum, should the material used for the wall not be strong enough to hold the glass.

Omitting the frame, the plate glass would be in direct contact with the marble, or stone or glass or whatever the material of the store front may be. No strip, no border, nothing between.

An ideal solution would be to have the plate glass flush with the wall. No recess for the glass. No mouldings. No frame. How to solve this problem is up to the architect. Its solution depends on the materials surrounding the plate glass. If he omits the window frame completely, the front itself becomes, in fact, the frame.

This method lowers the construction costs considerably. The metal work is entirely omitted. If you use glass for the store front—opaque or any other suitable glass—and plate glass for the window, then you are again lowering costs because you are working in only one material.





## WORKING IN ONE MATERIAL

Keep this in mind: because it is the quintessence of modern architecture, the goal toward which we are aiming.

The greatest possible use of a single material to solve a given problem.

For example, a building wall today is a structure of concrete, steel, brick, plaster, paint, wooden moldings. Seven contractors for one wall!

For a single chair we may call in eight craftsmen. For every single commodity we require a regiment of workers. And for a building we need a whole army, formed of different types of craftsmen. Civilization is burdened today with a false and unnecessary economic, and industrial structure. The highest aim of the new architecture will be attained through the utilization of one material, or two or three materials, to their utmost in the composition of a unit, whether it be a building, a room or a piece of furniture.

Standardized wall sections, ready-made at the factory, and put together at the building plot, will be the basic construction system of the future. Laying brick or stone one upon the other by hand is absurd under present day conditions.

Imagine the great savings this will effect. It will be the apotheosis of efficiency and will produce new harmonies, through its intrinsic simplicity, the genuineness of the materials and the perfect balance of function, and design.

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Unbekannter Fotograf: *unknown photographer*

Friedrich Kiesler, mit einer Widmung an Nelly van Doesburg, späte 1920er Jahre

*Frederick Kiesler, with a dedication to Nelly van Doesburg, late 1920s*



# The Floor of the Show Window

## FLOORS DEMAND A SPECIAL TECHNIQUE

If you forget everything pertaining to art and decoration, you might say, given a floor, the window is ready for merchandise.

That's true. But how about the height of the floor and the fixture to be used? This should depend on the merchandise to be displayed. Logically speaking, shoes need a different height from gowns, and so on.

It may be stated that the figure of the human being was the yardstick by which to determine the height of the merchandise to be shown. That meant shoes directly on the floor, hats about five feet above the floor level, and so on. The same system for furnishings—carpets low, chairs on the floor, china at the height of a table.

All this is, however, no longer suitable for us. Our experience in an axiom: "Any height for any merchandise is good, provided that the attention of the passerby is strategically focussed to the desired spot or spots in the window."

## THE PLATE MAY BE LOWERED

For this reason doors have kick-plates at their base, and the window floor is usually at least eighteen inches above the sidewalk level.

But let us see if it is not possible to lower the plate glass. It might be important for the display.

First of all the height of the window is increased. More chance for building up levels. The main difficulty, danger to the glass, can be overcome in this way: Fasten a plate about eight inches high to the outer wall of the store, resting it on the sidewalk. The material—metal, stone or even glass, plastic, and unbreakable. The plate glass if the show window itself is recessed three to six inches. If this is not sufficient for the protection of the glass—which may be the case on main streets with great streams of traffic during rush hours—then elevate over this kick-plate a bar, one or two inches above the kick-plate by vertical strips. The distance from the eight-inch kick-plate to the usual window floor level can be used for one or two stepped levels in the foreground.

For the quick passerby, the merchandise has to be raised above the average eye level. Otherwise people standing in front of or passing before the window obstruct too much of the view. When one walks, one looks straight ahead. It is unnatural to look down while walking. The display must be above the average eye level to attract the gaze of the quick passerby.

But after the display has attracted the passerby and she has stopped to look in the window, it is natural for her to lower her glance; and therefore small accessories, and even gowns, may be displayed on the stepped levels in the foreground.





## THE DISPLAY FIXTURE IS AN ELEVATED FLOOR

It is not a mechanical device whose use is limited to the support of the merchandise for which it was constructed. It also separates the varieties of merchandise from one another and gives to each piece individual attention and to each its own level.

## METHODS OF VARYING LEVEL

There are at your disposal any number of methods for creating different floor levels. The whole idea is full of fascinating possibilities. The more levels you bring into play, the more do spatial limitations disappear.

Here are some concrete suggestions for creating varying floor levels:

1. Use blocks.

Blocks in different sizes, heights and depths should be on reserve in your display store room. You can arrange these in your windows very much in the manner in which a child builds block houses. Have them low or have them high; it depends on the merchandise to be featured. Blocks, in different colors and sizes, are not expensive, and they can create an interesting window landscape. They may be of simple compoboard, plywood or glass illuminated from within, or cork, metal, formica.

2. Use spanned levels.

Against the background or the sides, plates may be fitted in to rest on specially provided ledges. These plates are movable at will. There may be several ledges so that you can arrange the plates at different

levels each time. The material suggested above may be again used here.

3. Suspend plates from the ceiling.
Here also the materials may vary. A very nice effect is secured through the use of plates of glass suspended by tubes or bands of metal or glass.

## NEW TECHNIQUES OF MECHANICALLY VARIED LEVELS

In designing the floors of the windows in a new store, an entirely new treatment can be introduced. The floor can be divided into nine equal sections, each to be raised or lowered to a desired height by a mechanical device. The result will be very similar to that achieved through the use of blocks, except that this contrivance does away with the necessity of bringing in, and taking out the blocks. It saves time, is more efficient. In a new store it should certainly be used.

## CHANGING DISPLAY

To facilitate rapid changing of displays several methods are open to you, adapted from the theater. You may have a trap floor in your window which can be lowered down to the basement where an exchange track will shunt it to one side and permit a new display to be hoisted up to the street window. Such an arrangement is in operation at Lord & Taylor, and in the Fifth Avenue unit of the John Ward shoe chain.

Very often there is a noticeable difference in the type of clientele patronizing a store during lunch hours and those shopping in the morning or late afternoon. To utilize the windows to their full





potential strength it might be advisable to change the display during the day. Trap floors in the windows make this possible with a minimum of effort.

Why not have a revolving floor in your window? That is, one so constructed that it can be turned around and a new display which was at the back of it brought into view of the street. The background or rear wall of your window would then act as the diameter crossing the circular flooring and separating the two displays. It is possible to have both working at the same time, one in the window and one facing the customer inside the store. No electrical mechanism is needed here, since the revolution of the floor can be worked by hand. It is an inexpensive installation, and capable of easy adoption by any existing store.

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Otty von Wassilko

Fredrick Kiesler, Paris 1925



# The Sides of a Show Window

The right and left eye of the show window have many possibilities which are not being utilized today. At first sight it would seem that not much can be done about them. The eye of the passerby is usually directed toward the middle part of the window. There is even the risk of distraction from the center of the window if the sides are haphazardly accentuated.

But because of the asymmetry which characterizes practically every modern creation in the arts, focusing the gaze of the spectator on the mathematical center of the window is wrong. It does not matter in which part of the window the merchandise is shown, provided that the whole scheme of the display has been consciously integrated into an harmonious unit.

## CONTRACT THE SIDES

The inflexible sides must become flexible. By moving one or both sides toward the center you diminish the size of the window but increase its effectiveness. In the open space toward the center a figure might stand contrasting with the background. The two sides give you new backgrounds for merchandise which may be set up in front of or on them.

This kind of window can have sides that are curved, square, or flat. Drapes or paper may be substituted for wood, metal, or glass if expense must be avoided. The plan is variable but, no matter how treated, gives you two side wings, and a flat open space towards the center.

Now you have the structural outline on which to develop designs to suit your particular purpose. The wings may be staggered or they may be arranged in a series of columns. They may have niches in which concealed lighting throws into prominence the articles featured. Illuminated letters may be posted on the wings. It depends on the merchandise to be shown and the message that is desired to be conveyed.

## MAIN AND SUBSIDIARY BACKGROUNDS

Contraction gives you different depths and different backgrounds in one display.

Start with your first background about two feet from the plate glass.

The next background can be two feet deeper and extend farther over to the center. You may continue this as often as the depth of your window allows. The two sides, of course, need not be similarly treated.

These varying depths are very desirable in a display in which different kinds of merchandise are introduced. Jewelry, for example, or vases, and pottery, should be shown close to the plate glass, while fabrics or clothing are best presented in a broader perspective.





## ASYMMETRY IS DYNAMIC

The rhythm which results from asymmetry is mobile and kinetic. Therefore if rightly composed, it directs the eye straight to the point to which you wish it directed. In this case it would be to your merchandise.

A symmetric scheme is static, and may easily become stiff, unless lighting effects, inscriptions, mechanical devices, are utilized to attract special attention. Schelling said: Architecture is frozen music. A static window may result in frozen business.

## EXPANSION

We have discussed new uses of the sides of the show window resulting in a contracted or diminished spacing. Now we must consider the results of the opposite process: expansion.

In the Saks Fifth Ave. windows I simply took out all the side walls which separated the fourteen windows and created a free rhythmic background throughout the entire window space. Each window seemed to continue into the next. Expansion was the basis of the rhythmic effect and continuity.

## ORCHESTRATE THE WINDOW FULLY

Expansion or contraction. Either may be introduced by intelligent use of the sides of your show windows. But to neglect them entirely is to limit yourself needlessly. You are like a composer who bars himself unnecessarily of the full use of the orchestral instruments at his command.

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Otty von Wassilko

Fredrick Kiesler, Paris 1925



# The Ceiling

The ceiling of the show window is not seen and therefore is not used for any decorative effect. Nevertheless it has distinct possibilities of its own and can do much to heighten the appeal of a display.

Usually the ceiling is simply the floor of the next story. It was not specially constructed or designed to aid the effectiveness of the window. As a rule it is of plaster and conceals a sprinkler system. Provision for special lighting effects is rarely included in its structure. Lights and reflectors are located as near as possible to the plate glass, just behind the valances. The main purpose of the valances is to hide the ceiling, and the reflectors.

## LIGHTING EQUIPMENT

With the immense increase in the use of lighting effects which is a certainty of the show window of the future, the ceiling inherits a more important role: that of concealer for equipment, floodlight systems, reflector attachments, etc. The valances will be lowered as much as two, three, or more feet to accommodate, and conceal this more intricate lighting apparatus.

## A NEW USE FOR VALANCES

The valances will now have grown to sufficient proportions to permit their use for lettering, to carry special announcements about the merchandise shown, or to draw attention to some promotion within the store itself.

It is also possible to recess the valances about two feet and, by introducing a little ledge as flooring, to compose a miniature window over the main display. The ceiling may be sloped down from these valances to the background at a sufficient incline to enable them to carry inscriptions too.

## THE CEILING IS FLEXIBLE

The ceiling of the show window should not be considered as a fixed, immovable barrier, a definite limitation in the planning of displays. Every component part of the window outline is flexible, and can be varied to suit the needs of the moment.

The ceiling should be raised or lowered according to the height of the merchandise displayed.

## ITS USE IN LIGHTING CONTROL

The ceiling may be of transparent paper, Viscoloid, glass, or transparent materials which permit indirect lighting, an even light diffused over the entire display.

In introducing floodlights, slope the artificial ceiling somewhat, and construct openings through which powerful beams of light can throw into prominence the spot in the display which it is desired to emphasize. To soften this effect, the holes may be spanned with some transparent material, such as gauze.





## THE CEILING AS A "FLOOR" FOR FIXTURES

In constructing new buildings, provision should be made in the ceilings of the show windows for devices from which fixtures may be hung. As pointed out in a previous chapter, plates, or other equipment may be suspended from the ceiling, and create several levels within one display in addition to the basic flooring.

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Associated Press

Friedrich Kiesler, New York Anfang der 1930er Jahre

*Frederick Kiesler, New York in the early 1930s*



# The Background

We have seen in the foregoing chapters that much can be done to enhance the artistic and practical values of the show window without even touching its background. And yet until only recently the entire technique of show window decoration was more or less restricted to the background.

This was only right and natural, just as the elements of stage decoration were for a long while confined to the backdrop.

The whole art of show window decoration was until only yesterday homemade and not style conscious. With the evolution and revolution in the field of the fine arts, however, under the guidance of Marinetti in Italy, Picasso in France, and the De Stijl–group in Germany, a new style consciousness was developed, whose influence penetrated into the adjoining fields of the applied arts.

The revolution in the theatrical arts, forecast by Gordon Craig, practically carried out by Reinhardt, and developed into Constructivism in Russia, and Austria—it is in its manifestations that we must seek the models of the show window decoration of today.

Looking through the glass into the show window is really like looking at the stage—with this difference: the actors, in art terms, are speaking plastics in motion, whereas the merchandise is a silent, static object.

Stores have tried to correct the fact that figures and merchandise are always seen from one angle only, from any given spot. Mechanical devices have been introduced which turn the objects slowly around, but the flaw in this expedient is that the object cannot be stopped in its orbit the moment the spectator wishes to retain a view in which she is interested. Before the same view reappears she is gone.

## A DREAM OF A KINETIC WINDOW

Here is an opportunity for someone to invent a push-button system for the convenience of the passerby, one that would open and close windows at will; which would select any individual piece of merchandise in which she deigned to be interested and bring it closer for examination; which would turn some material around and stop at any desired view; which would throw a stronger light at a given spot, should that be wanted. Prices may appear in response to the wish, replies be given to questions, and there may be some means, just as in an automat, of pushing money in and merchandise out. The direct contact between such a display stage and the passerby has been anticipated by the newest stage direction where contact between actor, and audience is sought. (Meierhold Tairoff, Reinhardt's "The Miracle"—The "Endless" Theater).

## DRAMATIZING THE MERCHANDISE

But to return to our comparative study on the evolution of stage and the dramatization of merchandise in the store.

The painted drop on the stage is equivalent to the temporary background in the show window.





The stage continued to use the painted backdrop until the development of plastic decorations which eliminated the flat canvas in the rear and the props to the right and left of the stage and substituted plastic forms. These cubical, three-dimensional masses permitted a greater play of light and shadow and afforded to the audience an entirely new feeling of space, and volume.

This was the second era in the development of the contemporary stage: the plastic on the stage—the architectural or semipermanent background in the store window.

The third epoch was ushered in by the invention of the motion picture: the mechanical or constructivist style.

Absurd to predict that flickering shadows will eject real life from the stage and reduce the special sphere of the theater to a flat screen, but with the introduction of sound in relation to film, and the creation of the "talkie," a new unprecedented technique—we may call it a fourth era—arose in the art of show presentation.

This era will ripen into a fifth state with the perfection of television, whose functionings will embrace and fuse all the dramatic arts through mechanical means. Real actors and stage volumes are eliminated. We are already living in a state of parallelism in the realm of showmanship; stage and talkies. Here the commercial world, always alert for new media of exploitation, will speed its acceptance far more rapidly than the theatrical world, which is weighed down and ossified beneath a mass of tradition. For the first time, the roles will be reversed, and industry will take the lead in perfecting a new means of decoration.

Until the theater is forced out of the momentary

"peep-show box" through the overwhelming and justified success of the "talkies," it will not realize the necessity of a new type of theater that I call the "Endless." There the impulse and the power of nature, actors, and public are coordinated in a new kind of spatial conception unprecedented in the theatrical arts, as television was in mechanical arts.

## PAINTED BACKGROUND
## THE SHOW WINDOW

The painted background has unlimited possibilities. You can easily adapt your color scheme to your merchandise. You may use board, canvas, or paper as a ground for painting in oils, watercolors, tempera, crayons, etc. I think a more liberal use of pastels could do much to enhance backgrounds. Their colors are soft, and may be applied without technical difficulties. Airbrush treatments are to be recommended as a facile method of covering larger surfaces. The use of patterns through which, or around which, airbrush applications may be spread, is a well known device.

As to color, contemporary art restricts their use vigorously. Don't use more than two or three together. Perhaps the best advice that can be given is: use color in not more than two or three gradations. Of course the effect depends largely on the design. I am surprised to find that masterpieces of painting, either old or modern, are not more frequently employed for guidance.





## PICTORIAL DECORATION

Even preferable to copying the painting would be the utilization of an enlarged photograph of it. This photograph might be framed in such a manner that the four sides of the frame would form a funnel receding from the surface of the plate glass. The sides and lower part of the frame could most advantageously be used for the display of merchandise.

You may announce that you are showing reproductions of famous masters, giving a title to each of the window series, thus adding much interest to the presentation. Developing this idea further, you may introduce into your settings actual photographs of local scenes, milieus where fashions such as you are showing were worn by prominent social luminaries.

Let us call this type of window: pictorial decoration.

A really inexpensive background can be made with spanned rolls of paper. These may be laid horizontally, vertically, in any rhythm or pattern. They may be woven in a variety of "weaves."

Simply past flat rolls of paper, either shiny or dull, on a board which has been fastened against the background and also perhaps against the sides. This requires no special outside aid, anybody in the store with paste and a little skill can carry it out. It would cost but a few dollars and is equally adaptable to a small window or to one fifty feet wide. If you are in doubt what patterns to use, study the modern rugs and you will find many. If you want your influences at first hand, then gain inspiration from the paintings of such artists as Mondrian, Braque, Ozenfant, Doesburg, Arp, Leger, Miró, and others.

Once you have erected your stiff background upon which to paste these colored papers, it is a simple matter to create new backgrounds. Paste new patterns over your old ones, changing both design and color. A variation of this technique would be to combine paper with fabrics and, if a still more striking effect is desired, introduce a variety of other materials in combination, which may either be pasted or nailed to the background. Feasible materials for this purpose are: metals, sandpaper in brown, black, and ochre, cork paper, enlarged photographs, enlarged typefaces, etc.

A further variation of this treatment would be the introduction of light as a contributing element to the rhythm or pattern of your composition. This can be attained by cutting openings, either round, square, or polygonal, in your background, fastening over them transparent paper or fabric, and illuminating from behind.

There are now available numerous wallpapers in more or less modern designs. Why not use them in the same manner as strips of colored paper? Changes can be effected in a few hours. You may combine the wallpapers with the spanned rolls of paper, framing the designs against a monochrome background.

"Composite backgrounds," as I will call them, are highly effective and are already occasionally used, in one form or another. It is astonishing, to realize that the origin of this type of decoration—combining a variety of materials to achieve a pictorial relief—comes to us from the most destructive, and radical artistic movement in Europe: Dadaism. It may seem fantastic to trace the current manifestations to this source. But in reality there is no artistic by-product so far fetched that is does not contain some potential commercial use. Certainly commerce benefits





continually from this condition. The question is: Does the artist benefit?

You may do some amusing things with your backgrounds, whether they are painted or photographed. Let us say we have a scene at a nightclub, in which a girl is the central figure. Instead of showing the head of the girl painted, make an opening where the head would be, and through this opening insert the head of a mannequin wearing merchandise, in this instance a hat. You may do the same thing with a hand, to show gloves, or with feet, for hosiery or footwear.

The Chauve-Souris, the Russian intimate cabaret, has used these backgrounds frequently, and to great advantage in its production.

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Unbekannter Fotograf; *unknown photographer*

Friedrich Kiesler vor dem Plakat des Film Guild Cinema, New York, 1929

*Frederick Kiesler in front of the poster of the Film Guild Cinema, New York, 1929*



# Light and Decoration

The next decade will witness a tremendous advance in the perfection of a technique of "decoration by light." As a decorative medium it will rival painting, sculpture; it may even replace architectural decoration.

## PAINT AND BUILD WITH LIGHT

I recall how fantastic and far fetched it sounded when I proposed, in the staging of a production of *R U. R.* in Berlin in 1922, that the stage decoration be projected instead of built up and painted. I succeeded in carrying out this "fantastic idea" by using slides or a moving picture which was projected from the rear of the stage on different parts of the setting. The play, incidentally, was a success, and in the years following my initial experiment it became quite common in Europe to employ this method of stage decoration. (Volksbühne Theater, E. Piscator, Berlin).

Several years ago in Paris when discussing with J. P. McEvoy the staging of his play *God Loves Us* I composed a series of sketches of a setting with rooms on three levels, all the walls of the rooms made of transparent materials, on which slides in black, and white or color, as well as films, could be thrown to permit instantaneous changes of the milieu of twenty-eight scenes.

## APPLYING LIGHT DECORATION TO THE SHOW WINDOW

Here is an idea for window decoration. Let us take a typical, old-fashioned window with the conventional wood-carved background. You have decided to discontinue the use of this background because you feel it is not no longer appropriate for the new, style-right merchandise you are displaying. In addition, you would like to change your decoration very frequently. The solution of both of these problems lies in painting, and building with light.

You have two ways of building such settings:

1. Using non-transparent materials
2. Using transparent materials

### 1. USING NONTRANSPARENT MATERIALS

In working with non-transparent, stiff materials, it is advisable to use them in sheets as large as possible. This is important from an economical point of view, inasmuch as these large sheets require much less bracing and clamping than smaller ones, and moreover sustain themselves much more easily through the sheer bulk of their proportions. These materials may be used: plywood; metal; fabrics; mirrors; compoboard.

In the case of wood, birch, or oak ply particularly recommend themselves. Either has a strong grain, and the surface of either may be treated in different ways to make it accord with the desired color schemes. Both are inexpensive.

In the case of metals, if a silver tone-basis is desired, use thin sheets of aluminum—1/16 of an inch thick—or zinc. Neither of these rust.





For a background of warmer coloring, use copper or brass. Brass is a very suitable material for modern decoration. It is not as soft as copper, yet possesses sufficient firmness to be readily malleable. In addition, it retains galvanizing better than steel, and may easily be given a gleaming silver or a dull brushed silver finish. At a very moderate cost, too, brass may be given a black gunmetal effect.

The reason why brass retains galvanization better than steel is that is has a porous surface which "sweats" in humidity, whereas steel harbors the moisture, permitting rust gradually to eat its way through to the surface.

These metals, either in their natural or galvanized finish, supply basic colors with which to work: black, silver, yellow, or copper. Painting is unnecessary. When compoboard or other paper-pressed materials—except bakelite—are used, painted surfaces are, of course, required. When woods are used, particularly strongly grained woods with a distinctive design, such as zebra, macassar ebony, American gumwood, walnut, never paint them but preserve the decorative effect of their natural grain. You may compose your setting with non-transparent materials in a square, rectangular, semicircular or stepped-back form without adding any design or special plastic decoration, simply juxtaposing solid colors on plane surfaces.

From the valances, the sides or bottom of your plate glass, you can project your decoration in the form of a pattern, colors, a figure or an announcement without spotting at the same time the merchandise within your setting. The merchandise itself may receive direct streams of floodlight from any part of the window you wish.

## 2. USING TRANSPARENT MATERIALS

To use transparent materials in your setting gives you an opportunity for much more interesting decorative schemes than are possible with non-transparent materials, yet their use holds certain dangers of which you must continually beware. Careful consideration of the exposition here presented is therefore urged, as the success of this type of display depends on perfect cooperation between the artist, the display manager, and the lighting mechanic.

We have all at some time in our youth been fascinated by a "magic lantern," by means of which we projected slides on a sheet of transparent material. To this humble origin we may trace the moving picture. The magic lantern with its slides, the moving picture apparatus, and sources of light placed behind transparent materials to produce a play of light and shadow in abstract forms—here you have the color organ upon which to compose, and execute your symphonies of light decoration. In addition: bulbs, footlights, etc.

Transparent materials on which decoration is to be projected from the rear must be placed much nearer the plate glass than is necessary with non-transparent, because adequate distance is needed between the projection equipment, and the screen to secure clear, sharp outlines.

In building settings of transparent materials it is possible to use frames instead of sheets and to span these frames with any of the following materials: silk, linen, woven glass hair, frosted glass, celluloid, casein products.

Several such spanned frames may be used in one setting, arranged in series, each differently decorated, permitting infinite variety in the play of light,





and shadow. In fact, the possible effects of decorating with light are so vast that very real danger exists of distracting attention from the merchandise.

To counter this, I would propose as a general suggestion that, for example, when a mannequin is used, it be placed in the center, with no decorated transparent material in the background, reserving your decoration for the sides, the ceiling or the floor.

## PROJECTION-BOOTH FRAME FORM

Provision may be made for the installation of a metal case all around the plate glass, either inside or outside the store. In this frame could be housed all the necessary projection equipment. This would eliminate hazardous installation, and, by widespread use, moreover, might become standardized to some extend to permit its manufacture on a volume basis as a regular part of the store equipment.

Light has already been realized as a genuine artistic expression, but it is only in the early stages of its development. There will be painting with light, and sculpting with light. You have often enough seen beams of light stand solid in space as compact as any plastic form.

Make use of this in your decoration.

## EFFICIENCY AT ITS HIGHEST

Decoration with light allows the quickest possible changes. It costs very little. You do not have to change backgrounds constantly, construct new settings, substitute other fixtures. Simply alter the patterns and colors of your lighting, and at once you have a new display.

## LIGHT AS ARCHITECTURE

In the theater that I designed for the Film Arts Guild in New York, the whole architectural scheme was based on the principles of the light-transmission. The entire auditorium became an agent in the projection of light on screens. The usual screen in the front of the theater can be expanded to the full width of the theater and then over to the side walls which are also screens that can be used when the action surges beyond the confines of the main screen. Not only is it possible that the auditorium further the action of the film, but, because of the receptiveness of the walls and the ceiling, the illusion of a totally different style and form of architecture can be created to endow the theater with an atmosphere which will harmonize with the nature of the picture being featured. For example, if a film with a medieval setting is being shown, the auditorium can be transformed into a Gothic cathedral with great pointed arches, and stained glass windows. The entire building is a plastic medium dedicated to the art of light.

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Berenice Abbott

Friedrich Kiesler in der Surrealistischen Galerie,
*Art of This Century*, New York, 1942

*Frederick Kiesler in the Surrealist Gallery,*
*"Art of This Century," New York, 1942*



# Notes on Designing the Gallery

Primitive man knew no separate worlds of vision and of fact. He knew one world in which both were continually present within in the pattern of everyday experience. And when he carved and painted the walls of his cave or the side of a cliff, no frames or borders cut off his works of art from space or life—the same space, the same life that flowed around his animals, his demons, and himself.

It is the principle of unity, primordial unity, the unity between man's creative consciousness and his daily environment that governs the presentation of paintings, sculptures, furnishings, and enclosures in these four galleries. That such unity once existed we know. We know that it was destroyed. The world today offers terrible enough proof that it must exist again. The work of art must resume its generic function as an active, organic factor in human life. Man, seeing in a piece of sculpture or a painting on canvas, the artist's projected vision, must recognize his act of seeing—of "receiving"—as a participation in the creative process no less essential, and direct than the artist's own.

Today, the framed painting on the wall has become a decorative cipher without life and meaning, or else, to the more susceptible observer, an object of interest existing in a world distinct from

his. Its frame is at once symbol and agent of an artificial duality of "vision" and "reality," or "image" and "environment," a plastic barrier across which man looks from the world he inhabits to the alien world in which the work of art has its being. That barrier must be dissolved: the frame, today reduced to an arbitrary rigidity, must regain its architectural, spatial significance. The two opposing worlds must be seen again as jointly indispensable forces in the same world. The ancient magic must be recreated whereby the God and the mask of the God, the deer, and the image of the deer, existed with equal potency, with the same immediate reality in one living universe.

It is up to the architectural technician of today to invent, in terms of his techniques, means whereby such unity can again be made possible. He can do this, not by debauching the honesty of any style preceding his own time, but simply by expressing through the methods of his profession his answers to the problems of life, and of that aspect of life which is art. A method of spatial-exhibition which I had begun to develop as far back as 1924, in Vienna, seemed in the present case, the just solution.

Miss Guggenheim, director of the gallery, agreed to the elimination of the frame.

Renaissance man was the last even to glimpse—in the dome of St. Peter's, the altarpieces of churches—this revelation of the universe as one harmonious whole. He had long since reduced the fresco to the easel painting, the architectural segment to the frame, and the work of art to a symbol of private affluence, and connoisseurship: all to meet the requirements of a changing society. During the centuries that followed, the breakdown of social unity was well under way. By the end of the nineteenth century it was complete. Individuals have tried to stem the onrush





of disintegration. But no single effort has been successful on the basic issue. Attempts have been made to eliminate the frame, to extend the painting over it, to mount it on a larger board—but, unless the whole environmental coordination changes, elimination of the frame remains absurd.

We, the inheritors of chaos, must be the architects of a new unity. These galleries are a demonstration of a changing world, in which the artist's work stands forth as a vital entity in a spatial whole, and art stands forth as a vital link in the structure of a new myth.

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Unpublished typescript, 1942.

Unbekannter Fotograf; *unknown photographer*

Friedrich Kiesler vor einem Betrachtungsapparat der Kinetischen Galerie, *Art of This Century*, New York, 1942

*Frederick Kiesler in front of a viewing device from the Kinetic Gallery, "Art of This Century," New York, 1942*



# Notes on Designing the Gallery (extended version)

Primitive man knew no separate worlds of vision and of fact. He knew one world in which both were continually present within the pattern of everyday experience. And when he carved and painted the walls of his cave or the side of a cliff, no frames or borders cut off his works of art from space or life—the same space, the same life that flowed around his animals, his demons, and himself.

It is the principle of unity, primordial unity, the unity between man's creative consciousness and his daily environment that governs the presentation of paintings, sculptures, furnishings, and enclosures in these three galleries. That such unity once existed we know. We know that it was destroyed. The world today offers terrible enough proof that it must exist again. The work of art must resume its generic function as an active, organic factor in human life. Man, seeing in a piece of sculpture or a painting on canvas, the artist's projected vision, must recognize his act of seeing—of "receiving"—as a participation in the creative process no less essential, and direct than the artist's own.

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to the more susceptible observer, an object of interest existing in a world distinct from his. Its frame is at once symbol and agent of an artificial duality of "vision" and "reality," or "image" and "environment," a plastic barrier across which man looks from the world he inhabits to the alien world in which the work of art has its being. That barrier must be dissolved: the frame, today reduced to an arbitrary rigidity, must regain its architectural, spatial significance. The two opposing worlds must be seen again as jointly indispensable forces in the same world. The ancient magic must be recreated whereby the God and the mask of the God, the deer, and the image of the deer, existed with equal potency, with the same immediate reality in one living universe.

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changing society. During the centuries that followed, the breakdown of social unity was well under way. By the end of the nineteenth century it was complete. Individuals have tried to stem the onrush of disintegration. But no single effort has been successful on the basic issue. Attempts have been made to eliminate the frame, to extend the painting over it, to mount it on a larger board,—but, unless the whole environmental coordination changes, elimination of the frame remains also absurd.

We, the inheritors of chaos, must be the architects of a new unity. These galleries are a demonstration of a new unity. These galleries are a demonstration of a changing world, in which the artist's work stands forth as a vital entity in a spatial whole, and art stands forth as a vital link in the structure of a new myth.

* Vienna City Festival of Music and Theatre Catalog, 1924: this method aimed at a varied transparency of the whole room, called L, and T units, used paintings without frames, sculptures on cantilever.
World's Fair, Grand Palais, Paris, 1925: coordinated suspension technique of display; later widely adopted in Europe especially for the display of photographs and photo-murals.
"International Theatre Exposition," New York, 1926: L and T method also used. Prize-winning competition plans for Woodstock Theater, New York, 1928: light-weight suspension and cable-lacing used.
Laboratory of the School of Architecture, Columbia University, New York, 1936: continuous lacing from ceiling to floor at various depths off the walls used for exhibits.
The plans for the galleries of "Art of This Century" were completed in New York, April 1942.

**Reference Material:** *De Stijl*, nos. 11/14, Paris 1925; Vienna City Festival of Music and Theatre Catalogue, 1924; *Architectural Forum* 41 (December 1932); *Shelter* 2, no. 4 (May 1932); *"The Universal," Theater Arts Monthly* (1936); *Contemporary Art Applied to the Store and its Display* (New York: Brentano, 1930); Alfred H. Barr, Jr., *Introduction to Cubism and Abstract Art* (New York: MoMa, 1936).

"Art of This Century," divided into four galleries, has been designed by Frederick Kiesler. He is an American citizen and has lived in this century since 1926. The "Little Review" and the Theater Guild invited him to come to the U.S.A. to construct the "Exhibition of International Theater Technique" for the opening of Steinway Hall in New York. He is now director of the Laboratory of the School of Architecture at Columbia University, and Scenic Director at the Juillard School of Music.

The architectural features of the four galleries of Miss Guggenheim's "Art of This Century" are as follows:

1. All installations are mobile and demountable. This applies to walls, partitions, mechanics, as well as lighting equipment.
2. All construction and equipment have been converted into such material methods as are ruled by the laws of priorities, a minimum of expense, shortage of labor help, and easy managing of the gallery.
3. A new system of coordinating architecture with painting and sculpture and their coordination to the spectator has been attempted. This new correlation system is a method of "spatial exhibition," inaugurated by Kiesler in 1924 in Vienna and followed through in Paris in 1925, and in New York in 1926, 1933, and 1937 at Columbia University. His spatial-exhibition method consists in not using walls for hanging pictures or for placing pedestals





for sculptures, but of a free arrangement of these objects throughout the space available, using, from a technical point of view, various methods of cantilever and suspension construction. One of the main features of such spatial-exhibitions is the necessity of eliminating all frames. The result achieved—contrary to one's expectation—seems to be much better possibility for concentrating the attention of the spectator on each painting, and therefore a better chance for the painting to communicate its message.

4. Improvements in lighting have been attempted, especially in one of the permanent galleries where the indirect lighting can be controlled for each painting individually. In all galleries, however, the color, intensity, and diffusion of light have been correlated in a new manner, namely, by planning the reflection coefficient of all the surfaces of the room in color as well as in volume, and their combined effect upon the paintings.
5. In the Daylight Gallery, actually a painting library, the spectator has a chance of sitting in front of mobile stands, and to adjust himself each painting to angles best suited for his own studying, also to exchange some of them from a built in storage.
6. Special attention was given to solve the problem of fatigue during the visit to a gallery. Three types of mobile seats have been constructed: a) a light weight portable folding chair with back, b) a type rooker, and c) a seven-way unit that can be used

for resting, and, if necessary, for attaching paintings, and sculptures in order to save additional expense of seats or partitions for larger exhibition material.

7. The Surrealist gallery uses curved walls all throughout from which special arms are protruding, carrying paintings, inclined in a manner, which permits the visitor to study them better, either seating or standing. The curvature of these walls, in coordination with planned lighting, also claims at a better spatial relationship between architecture, paintings, sculptures, and the spectators.
8. In another gallery triangular suspension columns are used for the fastening of paintings, the number of which can easily be increased or their location changed, according to the desirability of the exhibition material.
9. The fourth gallery is devoted to an automatic method of showing paintings. There is a paternoster for paintings of Paul Klee, which provides for automatic release of these paintings, the control of which is in the hands of the visitor. A similar method applies to a spiral wheel that shows in a continual flow fourteen most important paintings, and designs of special reproductions of Marcel Duchamp. Both methods were conceived to add more display space within a small area.

These are some of the major features. Plans for the galleries and for the equipment of "Art of This Century," were finished in April 1942. Since then till the





opening, all construction has been worked out in small shops in the New York area, with their distinct help to carry through the actual remodeling in these difficult times to the point of often sacrificing their financial profits. In that respect—no matter what the success of the enterprise may be—these galleries represent the result of a splendid cooperation between the workmen, the owner, and the designer.

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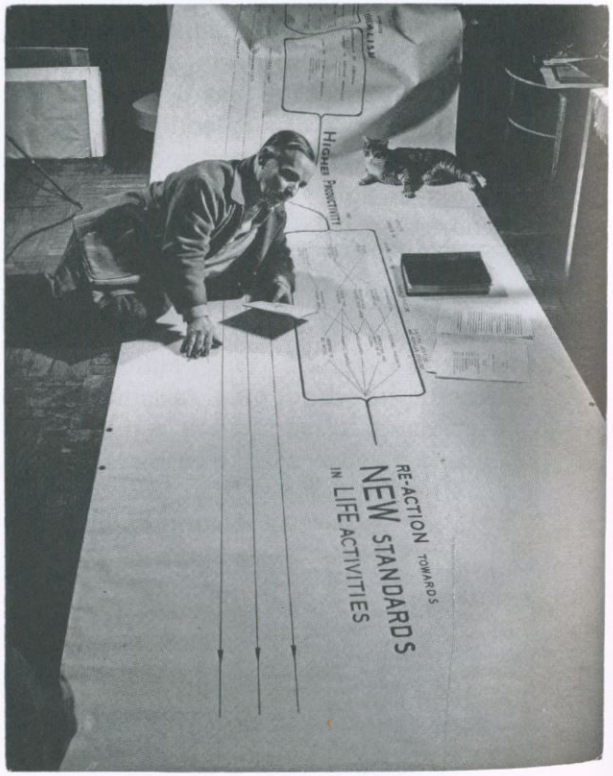
Unpublished typescript, 1942.




Ben Schnall

Friedrich Kiesler mit seiner Katze Sing Sing
auf seinem „Metabolism Chart", New York, 1947

*Frederick Kiesler with his cat Sing Sing*
*on his "Metabolism Chart," New York, 1947*



# Design-Correlation as an Approach to Architectural Planning

Design-Correlation as an approach to architectural planning demonstrated time and time again, as for example, twenty years ago in the plans for "The Endless," to unify in one structurally continuous building the visionary magic of theater, the cinema and sports, and currently, in the galleries of Peggy Guggenheim's "Art of This Century," I utilized it again to break down the physical and mental barriers which separate people from the art they live with, working toward a unity of vision and fact as prevailed in primitive times, when seemingly conflicting experiences existed in complete harmony, when the God and the representation of the God, the demon and the image of the demon were equally immediate and real, thus following the processes of natural growth, developing the flow of inherent forces which produce forms while integrating and disintegrating at varying speeds, a continual rebirth of all organic and inorganic life and of the plastic arts, technology and architecture, factors which man has gradually learned to detect and measure, the radiation field of the human heart, the energy of a cosmic ray, the electrical emission of solar radiation, captured in the experimental Wilson chamber, whereby a radiant particle leaves a path of heat condensation are thus made to reveal, to the cosmic blindness of

the human eye, nature's own design of force, the ultimate significance of the unknown, that eternal matter which builds the poet's, the architect's, or the plastic artist's structure on the orbits of energy which simultaneously correlate, and design.

The correalist tool shown on the opposite page is intended for special service in the multiform needs of a museum-gallery. There is a minimum of eighteen variables inherent in the use of this tool.* The nuclear concept of its design can be demonstrated by turning the pattern in four positions. In each of the constellations a field of attraction is created in which the tool as well as the environment participate. To operate: turn cut-out to fit into the two grooves of each of the four pointers designated as: nf——2, nf——3, nf——16 and nf——18. (nf stands for nuclear field; the number accounts for one of the eighteen variables). When brought into position each of these four fixations starts to form a specific group-constellation with units of the environment: nf——2 with someone distant, and finally approaching the nuclear form to rest in it; nf——3 showing the nucleus extending its attraction along an upright path toward an oval-shaped sculpture, the weight of which will ultimately be supported by the nucleus; nf——16 illustrates the enlarging capacity of the original unit by continual repetition to accommodate a larger influx of listeners to lectures or concerts; nf——18 two paintings combining with the nuclear unit for exhibition purposes.

* Accounted for in the February issue of the *Architectural Forum*, four of which are here demonstrated.





An instrument to facilitate the co-reality of fact and vision, and specifically to demonstrate the transformation of images into eidetic visions.

A shadow box with three apertures: An oval frame of wood, a circular opening cut into black glass and an iris diaphragm-shutter. The object to be viewed, in this case a plastic relief, the poem-object 1713 by André Breton, is placed within the box. One side of the shadow box extends into the dividing window of two rooms, allowing the vision free access into the adjoining room and through a transparent curtain into the street beyond. The spectator finds himself mirrored in the surface of the black glass as well as in the seven concave mirrors of different diameters cut into this glass. On the iris shutter he views the portrait of André Breton topped by his signature. Letter A of this signature conjures the number seventeen and letter B evokes the number thirteen. By lifting the lever of the instrument the portrait disappears, the iris-shutter opens completely and the portrait is replaced by a view of the poem-object 1713, which can be seen inside the shadow box. This design forms a consummation of personages and events related to the year thirteen of the 1700s. Having absorbed the image, the spectator returns the lever to its original static position, and finds himself outside the spell of the shadow box, mirrored again in his own environment. Looking aside, as he will in stepping away, he becomes aware through the window of the division between the room he stands in and the space he views through it. A piece of glass-skin, invisibly countersunk into the frame, separates the two spaces acoustically. A painting placed in the middle of the glass pane blocks the free travel of vision through it, emphasizing the spatial division, the same way as does the diaphragm-shutter of the

shadow box between the exterior, and interior of it. The spectator now walks to the left of the shadow box, entering the room he saw behind the painting. He can then look back into the room he just left through the same window-square. His vision is again partially blocked by the painting in its center which bears another image on its reverse side. Looking back into the room, he came from will make the painting disappear as soon as the memory-image completes the view of the room.

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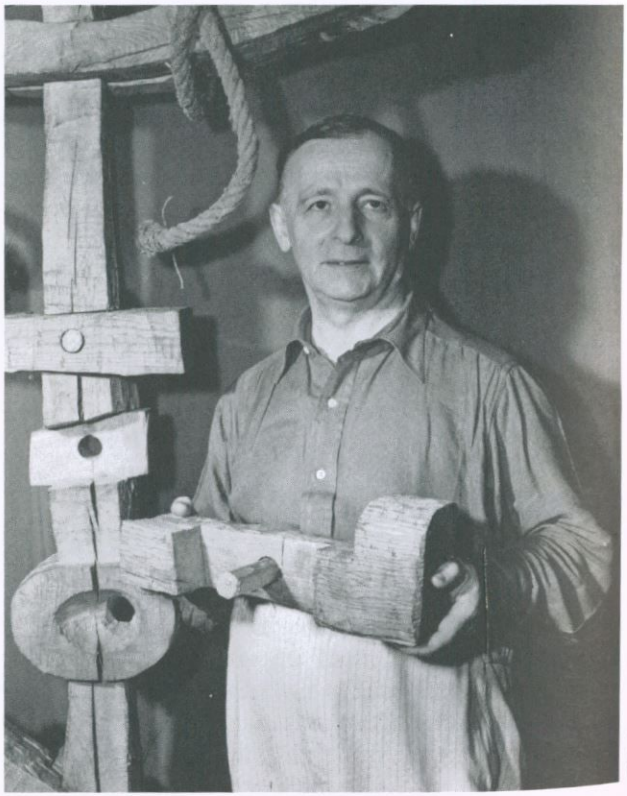

Unbekannter Fotograf; *unknown photographer*

Friedrich Kiesler mit seinem *Le Totem des Religions* in der *Exposition International du Surréalisme*, Paris 1947

*Frederick Kiesler with his* Le Totem des Religions *at the* "Exposition International du Surréalisme," *Paris 1947*



# Art, Money, and Architecture

A gallery is a place where pictures and sculptures are sold. It is a marketplace under a solid roof. In Hellenic times, any artist of public repute, selling a piece of art privately, was liable to be condemned as a prostitute; eventually he was imprisoned; or, as in the case of Phidias, left to die. We put even death to work for better prices and profits all around. Yet, in our time the artist's best friend, for acquiring food, and fame, is the dealer.

A good gallery is therefore a marketplace where artifacts (let's call them by their proper name) are sold, and sold for good money.

This is not an essay on socioeconomic (as the easy term goes) conditions under which art is produced, galleried, and sold: it is an essay on the role of the architect, who is called upon to design a gallery-market, is to play, if he is to sell himself successfully. Successfully means that he must, by his newly created habit of a gallery, make the pictures and sculptures look as good as they are supposed to, or even better. If he achieves that, he is a good architect; if he does not, he has failed in his duties. He must know that he is an accomplice in a selling world of art objects, and, as the rules of a secret order, he must stick to them once he has joined the ranks.

The best thing he can do in this embarrassing situation (to put it mildly) is to say to himself that after all, he is helping out, not only the dealer to sell, and the artist to earn a living, but even the promotion of art. It's a pretty seductive situation for any designer who lives on the fringe of art and architecture, of society of the upper levels and of publicity in a world of ruthless competition. The moral question does not enter the field of consideration because it is, so to say, *hors concours*. The moral question of art and commerce is, as far as the architect is concerned, a dead duck. It was shot down long ago, and to revive the carcass, he feels, is beyond his strategic position. Besides, he actually does not take any responsibility for the type of paintings or sculpture exhibited. That responsibility rests today with the dealer, and the artist.

The question is, can an architect do a good job, if he associates his idea of true art with that of a Dealer whose aims may be bent predominantly toward material gains and where art is one of the opportunities toward it? How far can he deny himself truth in order to accept a business proposition, which may not give him the satisfaction of having a chance to do a creative job. If the job is "pure business," he relieves himself a priori of any moral responsibility as to "pure art": he is simply nothing more than a functionalist. That is, he provides as much and as well-lit wall area as is technically possible, and finances available, he may place some chairs or a bench, some plants, and eventually a soft floor cover, into the premises. As a matter of fact, neither the Dealer nor the artist expect him to do more. Furthermore, as a matter of fact, they would resent him doing more. The Dealer wants to save money (and do most with a minimum of expenses),





and the artist is afraid that a "more" might detract from his exhibited work.

To make the present state of affairs of gallery design clear, it is necessary to elucidate the meaning of "a more."

"A More" is exactly the surplus that makes *Shelter* into *Architecture*. Just that much and "no more." With regard to a gallery design, it would mean exceeding the mere physiomechanical with its inherent diet-aesthetic, and infusing responsibility into every detail and into the total concept. That is, a definite belief into art as a part of life. That life would be opposed to the habitual run of routine-orders, because the artist is never—can't ever—be of his time. He is, always, by necessity, ahead of his time. Time, his time, is the spring-board into the time beyond his time. And his work is the concrete bond to the here and the beyond. Art is the visualized link between the known, and the unknown. The artist poses the question, his work gives the answer. If it fails to give the answer to those attuned to it, he remains a prisoner of *his* time. He is a *mere contemporary*, for whom Art has only contempt. The *comptoir* of business will accept him, if he has enough professional skill acquired to bring the traditional way of painting or sculpting up to the minute of fashion. His paintings will fit the interiors of the various homes like feathers, a cap. They are trophies. Products of true art are not trophies; they are humble; they are the very expression of humility. Every use of a true work of art as a trophy, is a crucifixion.

Thus, one can readily see that the architect has to know his stand from the beginning. He cannot rely on others for directions. The measurements of the outer, the space, the place, the costs, are customary food for the grinding teeth of his office-machine.

But his teeth, be they as sharp as those of the shark, will not be able to grip the substance of belief. Such an attack will find the substance as elusive as ectoplasm. Belief, then, is the primary building material of architecture. It is also the building material of Art; that is, of the artifacts, painting, and sculpture, down and inward from the walls of the houses, embracing the pieces of furniture, every so-called practical unit of service, truly every object, be it flat (like a rug or a curtain) or three dimensional (like a pot). *It is the substance incarnate.* Belief is the great TRANSformer of the banal into the superior. It is the magic power given to the artist by nature. He can use it or misuse it, but he cannot escape its responsibilities—he can only delay, and this delay may take hundreds of years.

We have shed this responsibility since the middle of the eighteenth century. It is only now, after two world wars, that we are shaken in our conceit of dominating peoples, as well as nature itself. And while our scientists gain more and more power of the secrets of Nature's structure, her materials and building methods, the creative artist has entered the opposite direction; namely, instead of splitting and fission, he is regaining the wisdom of correlation, and fusion.

*Correlation and not segregation is the belief of the artist and of the architect composing today.* To say that Art and Architecture should try again to UNITE, as it has become the fashion since the war, is putting the cart before the horse; because, in order to pull the cart, the driver must know the road. Suppose the road does not yet exist?

To illustrate the problem, let's look into the circumstances under which the "World House Galleries" were inaugurated.





A man of considerable wealth decided two years ago to enter into the art market. He was never an art dealer in his life, and although interested in paintings, he actually never owned a painting, and never sold one. A man of action, he leased two floors in a city block-front, gave orders to an architect to transform the space into an art gallery and left for Europe to buy paintings and sculptures. Within a year he traversed Europe from top to bottom and forwarded over six hundred paintings, and pieces of sculptures to America. He had thus created the basic stock for the forthcoming exhibitions of one year.

As architects, we were confronted with an unusual situation. First, we did not know the paintings to be exhibited. Second, we were given complete freedom, and no information as to character of design. Third, a rather large sum of money was put at our disposal, with no strings attached.

An almost ideal situation. No questions. There was a man at work who cared more about vision than experience. He apparently had great courage, independence and relied solely on instinct. No better client to have. But as we started to plan, to design—not so much left in darkness but rather too much light—doubts started to arise as to the validity of our own contribution, and finally, as to the whole enterprise. Even the information that his basic idea of the gallery was to give "all" nations of the earth a place to exhibit year by year the work of their artists—even such a generous move toward world peace could not banish our rising dilemma as architects.

Was it solely a marketplace? A museum? A private collection open to the public? What public? What strada? And what was the balance between running expenses and investment? And what balance of trends of art?

The time was too short for classification by correspondence. It was June. The Gallery was to open December 12th. We needed a minimum of three months construction time. Our minds were pressed hard between accepting and rejecting. Time was running short. A decision had to be made. The decision forced a twofold dictum. Not to design a specific gallery, but a *new type*, and furthermore, to take full responsibility for the new concept—facing our client, our artists, but chiefly ourselves—which meant, our relation to Art. We realized now that that was, or had become, the pivot of the structure in all its implications.

We, as artists so I argued, must know and not fool ourselves, that we live in an interregnum. We, as a public, have no inner contact with Art. As a people we have lost connection outwardly as well as inwardly with art as it, for instance, existed in the time of the cave dwellers; or, if that is too offending for our civilized character, as it still exists among the American Indians. There, Art is still a part of everyday life—a ritual closely interwoven with fate; the expression of a faith into the interrelationship of cosmic forces with man. Birth and death are the two gates which no man can escape; one for his entrance, the other for his exit. On his path from one to the other, he needs guidance. Guidance here stems from a belief, an instinctive assuredness in continuity, in eternity. That life exists before entering the first portal and that life continues after one has left the second portal. No one was sure what type or form that continuum had—except we. We seem to know that the Eternity of Man is a fable. His death is death for Eternity. We therefore have to make the best of our time between the two portals, and live as fully as "humanly" possible. Our belief has changed





from Eternity to NOW. Of course, there is too short a time to give birth to Art. But it is plenty of time to develop industry. And this we have done. The artist who is born into this world, not by his own choosing, is under such condition, a truly displaced person. Socially speaking, he is a persona non grata. Yet, by his very stigma as a specific individual he has to, he must produce objects of Art. What to do with it, is in truth, the great calamity of our civilization. His products must find an artificial place to rest, lest they perish. There is none a priori. The place has to be searched for, artificially created, and is finally bought in exchange for the painting. In this emergency, marketplaces had to be installed for selling and buying of Art, Art galleries. There, people interested in this merchandise, come, see and eventually acquire a work of Art. Then the painting or sculpture finds a home, the naked walls of an apartment. The work of Art will help to obliterate the bareness, the inhuman aspect of empty walls, and standard interiors. The wanderings of the Art product is thus brought to a halt. Temporarily. As soon as the owner changes his address, the painting changes its home too. Its fate reminds me of the destiny of the "wandering Jew." When the owner dies, or the inheritors, then the painting either ends in a junk pile or in the vaults of a Museum.

Art has not always been on the go. But gradually—since the ending of the High Renaissance—paintings started, one by one, to descend from their native walls or ceilings, clad in frames, memories of their architectural landscapes. Sculpture, too, stepped down from niches, pedestals and pediments, and started a mass exodus across the earth—and they are still on the march. Homeless art is wandering

ceaselessly throughout the civilized world, looking for a place to rest, a home where it might be reasonably appreciated, cared for, and, eventually, loved.

What then is the problem of an art gallery today? The diversity of products, the swiftness of their coming and departing demand a refuge for paintings and sculpture, a home that can halt, at least for a time, the rapid trade-wings, and make possible the growth of a relationship for which they were created.

Therefore the first consideration in conceiving the gallery must be a design that would make conductive a meeting between painting and visitor. It would have to be a sort of planetary system, a world of its own (within the big wide world) where the latent potentialities of both are freed to act on each other. It seemed to me, the "chance of correlation" must be (so to say) built in an atmosphere of endless continuity, where the meeting will have an automatic chance of recurring; love at first sight is a rather rare phenomenon.

In order to promote *correlation in continuity* within the two floors on Madison Avenue, it soon became clear, that, before any attempt of sketching, and scaling could be drawn, a spatial as well as an ideological introduction to the world of art should be imagined. One does not fall into art directly by a house door. And by introduction I do not mean a lobby.

To help the "unbiased" approach to art (and architecture, if possible), the fundamental hiatus between art and nature had to be unmistakably and immediately demonstrated. This was achieved by making the visitor step (as soon as he entered) on to an island of white marble—a square-area of the main exhibition hall. This island was actually separated from the surrounding wall by a river-bed of several feet (three or four), a trough filled with water





(not deep) and bordered on the far edge with green foliage. From there rose the walls of a double-height space, three of which serve as carriers of paintings. Thus the visitors were first kept at bay from them, not only physically but through the unexpected shock of seeing the separating water-bed. It set them (invariably) aback, wondering, and actually stopped them in their customary run-through of galleries and museums. They were gently, but rather forcefully, arrested in their routine pattern of observation, paused and, at this moment, developed the *chances of correlation*. It was the artists themselves and modern art historians who objected most violently to the water. That the water with its cataract sound and the foliage were abstracted symbols of nature, of that nature that fed their imagination, a source, that in modern artistry developed into a scourge, and that by its very realism could enhance the new reality they so desperately try to achieve—that did not occur to them. They thought it was an advertising trick, slick, a decor, to detract from their work. What could the criterion for the proper judgement of their work be, if not art confronted with the very source of origin? BUT we must learn to understand that art has gradually broken its bonds with nature, not as in contrast to aims and methods of creation but in a promethean attempt to steal the fire in order to extinguish it and light its own artificial flame. Abstract art does not only represent a revolt against the petrified art of the past, and its allied civilization, but a revolt against any parenthood, be it God, gods, the Trinity, pagan domination, religion—all hierarchies of beliefs, all content. It contents itself with itself.

It was, and still is, a violent protest of young generations who feel they have been cheated of their rights to be as they are in art or life, having been

forced to give themselves in war after war; to give themselves to save economic destructions of families and nations, and be eternally confronted with fossilized duties. *The contemporary artist has torn Art from its mooring to the contents of the past.* With passion he has captured Art from the Artist's sake. The totems and tabus of traditions were obliterated. Freed of fundamental content—to be, was not to follow, but to act—to act fast, and furiously because a single man's life, even a genius', is too short to recreate what blindfolded generations had evidently lost. What a glorious challenge! The canvas became a battlefield—relentless releases of brush strokes in almost automatic drives to capture the beat of an immediate life-impulse.

The artist was out to create his own NATURE, the perfect ANTI-nature, the only possible contribution of man to Nature. This excursion of the last fifty years into the realm of absolute independence, of the abandonment of interdependence—no matter from where and where to—is a heroic effort of the artist worthy of his basic allegiance to freedom. But the prodigal son will, and must return.

When he returns he will have acquired a new sense; one in addition to his six sensory correlatives, namely, the *consciousness of space-time*. This was a gift of his time, bestowed upon him secretly during his wanderings: a gift of his time to propel himself out of his time into regions heretofore never reached by men of art. Science and philosophy have finally intertwined, and he got the message. And by that I mean the awareness of space-time as a working fact, not as a mystic perception. He will once more know that he belongs to a universe and not only to 56 Seventh Avenue, New York City, or to 31, Avenue





Reille, Paris, France. With that in his pocket, he can safely enter the Void of Art and pay his debts to history. He finally can proceed to transform the void. He depends neither on easel painting nor fresco to express himself. He has freed himself of the freedoms and styles of historic youth and begins to attach himself more closely and more widely to everyday facts in his new search for truth. Only there can he find himself; only there can he find seeds of crystallizations such as paintings, sculpture, of all the artifacts of generations to come. Not in museums, not in galleries, not in books, photo tabloids, and color pinups.

To provide the play-space now for a world to come was impossible—unless it was a matter of persistent belief. A belief that a new principle of correlation could become the key to unlock the labyrinth of standardized modern art. There were clear indications of howling from its depth, of knocking from the inside, of outward pressures.

Paintings, in the last decade, have strangely grown wider, much wider; particularly wider (not so much elongated). In France, in America, there was and is a growing tendency to expand the canvas from two to twenty feet in width. Few galleries are equipped to handle such space-monsters. Fewer private clients have room for it. The prices are accordingly larger too—yet the tendency persists, and it is not a fad. It is simply the need to expand beyond frames, beyond borders; a tendency to break through enclosings, be they of gold or simple wood baguettes or be they blocking walls to the left, and right of a painting—a scream of elbow room, for breathing space.

Mondrian in the early twenties had already thrown aside the enclosure of the frame, taped-over

the shame of the exposed nail-heads along the edges and added significantly a piece of wall to the painting by fastening it to a flat strip of wood. In other words, rather than hanging the painting, he attached a piece of wall to the painting, which now protruded—stepped forward into the room. It was no longer a decorative patch on the wall. It detached itself from the flat surface of a background, became more independent, and at the same time reached into the realm of three-dimensionality, ready for contact with "outer space." The step toward a new ritual of de-framing was inaugurated. In fact it was the premature answer to the coming of an ever-expanding Universe of Architecture, in spite of a consistently growing individualization of all the parts of our mass-made world.

Even I, who came belatedly to execute sculptures and paintings, had called them *Galaxies*, simply because I combined many panels (without frames), sometimes three, sometimes eight, into a single constellation. They were planned in strict intervals apart from each other: I also attached them nearer or further away from the wall, parallel to it or slightly inclined. Most of them protrude on elongated arms or are suspended from the ceiling. Detachment and independence from a wall, ceiling or floor became imperative; imperative because the *unification* of the various units of paintings (or sculptures or both) had to be inherent in their correlation, and not the result of an a priori enclosure. The unity of the environment had to sustain itself.

Perhaps a description of one *Galaxy* of painting (of seven different units) will help illustrate this point of a plastic continuum. It started with one painting on the floor, jumped into relation over quite a distance to another painting on the wall. This one was





part of other neighboring panels, and the correlation finally continued (without physical contact) its composition towards the ceiling which already carried a large painting suspended eight inches beneath the surface. Correlation from the ceiling downward toward the opposite wall continued with another panel and this way closed the cycle of turn and return. In other words, this was a *spatial coordinate* rather than a mural, consisting of paintings where the observer would find himself surrounded by them, not by a solid phalanx of walls, ceiling and floor, blocked and locked up, but by paintings placed in such strategic points of the total structure of the room that they would add up to a complete but elastic enclosure. The paintings could be moved and adjusted to different sizes for different rooms. The composition could expand or contract in any direction, and became part of the sensitivity of those living with it. Neither easel nor mural paintings grant spatial elasticity. Whatever we, artists or architects or art historians may think of this foray of painting and sculpture into the realm of the continuum, the fact remains that the measures of the intervals alone safeguard a definite code to interpret a message; and a message it has to be, the only link that will hold the plastic arts together.

Most significantly, even the paint-patterns themselves of our masters of abstract art, and those of their followers, have a drive either to *push toward, and beyond the edges of the canvas;* or, like inhaling, loose brush-strokes huddle towards the centres of the canvas, gathering like herds during a storm before breaking loose again.

Sculptors, too, have opened up their hermetic enclosures of form. They tore statues limb from limb, leaving vistas through their bodies like naked trees. Abstract or not abstract—sculptors were

building *with wind and void* as much as with bronze, and steel. The carousel of faraway horizons which shone through the sculpture, made it part of a wide universe. The visual solitude was broken.

And so our gallery had to take *dimensioning of wall space* into fresh scrutiny. The elasticity of architectural areas, regarding width and height and depth, had to be geared not only to existing norms of paintings and sculptures, but also to those new measures in process of crystallization. Evidently it already had to anticipate, and provide for those unexpected but now frequent happenings of large stretches of far-flung images. But more than doing this or that, the urge for *expressing space-continuity plastically* became unmistakably a new law. It is exactly that subject matter that the gallery attempted architecturally.

Architecture took the lead; took the lead from Art. It took painting and sculpture by the hand and led them safely back home to architecture. There they will be nurtured with patience and feel securely protected until maturity.

Now, the two floors of the gallery were wrapped into a single elliptical enclosure. In this way they were unified, made into continuous space. Floors of the lower areas continued in hyperbolic curvatures upward into the ceiling of the upper floor, sliding down and rising partly again, falling suddenly, as into air pockets. They rose upward again, and finally downward, becoming a bent wall at the other end of the long, long room; and did not stop in their flow there either; near the floor, the flow of the total elliptical enclosure suddenly protruded into a bench, curled backward (underneath), swung rapidly forward again into the floor, becoming actually the floor itself, rolling on and on thus concluding a new





geometry of space. It was like a deep breath—an embrace of all the areas to be dedicated to art. With its curvatures, its contrasting planes, its segmented parabolas, sinuous flows, fins of sharp crystalline columns, the illusion of *endlessness* seemed achieved. Yet, as in the structure of the atom, a galaxy of many particles, unified but diversified and highly individualized in all its components, so the total gallery, in spite of being one vast organism, gave birth to innumerable hollows, cubes, hexagons, minor and major spatial coordinates—all future shelters, harbors, havens, and proud shields, ready to carry the works of the artist—as if the mother-gallery was solely and only dedicated to the one, and only painting or sculpture of the moment.

A gallery's light must come out of darkness, and disappear into darkness. On its way it strikes the painting, the sculpture, the architecture. It enwraps it with one, two or three luminous clouds, rendering it visible, making it magical, seductive. But it never treats its children alike—one intensity for all. No, that would be a wrong interpretation of democracy. Each painting demands its own frequencies of luminosity, its coolness or warmth, a halo, or none. One allover blazing white light gives equality to walls and their paintings alike. Neither like it. They throw it back at you with the bleak glare of a grimace that can easily annihilate the sensitivity of both your retinas. To retain the contact between visitor and exhibit *silence of light is essential.* We felt we had to adhere strictly to that, and did, in spite of costs, and technical shortcomings. But we also avoided, the opposite technique of museal illumination, namely, pinpointing beams with their obvious voice of the barker appraising a merchandise.

There arose an unexpected question to be seriously considered: the discrepancy between the light a picture was painted in and once lived with, and the "special" contemporary lighting it is subjected to. Not that we felt one should imitate, repeat more or less exactly the period-lighting, either of the artist's studio or the painting's homes—but we simply could not see a Rembrandt against a white-washed wall showered with direct or indirect luminosity from incandescent or fluorescent bulbs. If I could remain only a question of more or less light, the answer would be not too difficult to arrive at; but if we are aware of the fact that *whatever*, we, as architects, are planning in a gallery amounts invariably to an *introduction* toward understanding or misinterpretation of the artist's world, then certainly light in a gallery becomes a paramount problem.

The individualization of each exhibit was the final goal. Naturally each needed isolation, but only such isolation as its character would demand, and tolerate. Simply spacing them wide apart will not do.

The obvious is disappointing. The bleakness of deliberately overextended empty areas between paintings is a makeshift in dis-coordination and coordination. The problem had to be solved within the total continuum of a gallery. Architectural dimensioning, leading toward a new *grammar of measures* is the only possible solution to such an intricate problem of coordinating the plastic arts without sacrificing the individuality of each. In any case, the dimensioning of one adjoining wall area to the next—this to the next—and the following to those opposite, directly facing or oblique—is all important to the initial approach—to the so-to-say invitation to a meeting between the painting and the visitor.





And certainly it is part of the cycle of relationships that will develop at once, and immediately afterward when he steps forward, aside, or looks backward—even if only casually to glance again, holding the first impression or deepening it by suddenly viewing from a longer perspective. The object (painting or sculpture) must remain the focus at any distance. To achieve such spontaneously creative contacts, the measures of relationships must avoid any standardized architectural modules. Indeed industrial-design modules are death-blows to Art-in-Architecture. But now a new aesthetic can unfold its wings, freed from the prison of the grid.

The unique equality of a painting or of a sculpture defeats itself when facing the importance of content. Dealers have pinnacled quality as such. The buildup of a unique quality lifts, sky-lifts prices, not only of the "supposedly" one and only masterpiece but of the entire production of the particular artists—truthfully of all art and artists as long as they produce regularly, and diligently.

We all know that the *extraordinary* can only be produced by the extraordinary. He is called genius, and as such is unique. No communism, imperialism (they have tried), or democracy can change that. But at no time is the search for genius greater than in prosperity, because the premium for his product is the best investment. The average or near-genius talent resents the extraordinary not because he envies his gifts but because he has to follow him to *appear* unique. We cannot blame him for these thrusts at genius, because there is no *honorable* ground where he can grow according to his own need, and be esteemed and survive by the labors of his own talent. Society today forces the good talent,

the ordinary, into the role of the extraordinary. To play this role is a must, even when he faces himself. Such a life is a continuous invitation to moral, and artistic breakdown.

But it seems only reasonable to assume that in a new coordination of social and creative factors, geared to the transformation of a basic belief in human relations into the plastic arts, be they architecture or the "fine arts," artifacts down and up the line, that under such widespread correlation, each and every talent "can afford" to be himself and stop being someone else. Of course, art can become a necessity, and its product taken out of chance-survival and gamble. In a world which is riding progress at neck-break-speed, the barrier that cannot be jumped over is Art. But it must not be based in the *quality of uniqueness*. That foundation is too pinpointed, the base too narrow. It is the vast terrestrial rock bottoms that form the granite rising from the sea: that eternal resistance to the surge and beating of tidal waves which make us topple into conformity, and imitation. That granite rock is Art.

Conversely, an artist giving in his metamorphosis of an idea only a narrative account of a content, necessarily as abstract, and untouchable time itself, such an artist degrades his vocation to empty symbols, allegories to the ambition of uniqueness in professional techniques.

Of course, it is not only art-in-commerce that has elevated the extraordinary beyond the reach of the average: museums have helped to build the "Myth of Unique Quality." It is their prerogative. But when one day the destiny of art will not be its isolation in a museum, the picture's picture will change. The accent will be on the honesty of the artist's interpretation of a content, be he painter, sculptor, or





architect. The trickeries of techniques, specific styles or crutches of realism, non-objectivity, neo-tradition, then will become the hokum of bored citizens of the inevitable last resort and subterfuge of artists in panic. The artist of today depends entirely on selling to the UNKNOWN; indeed this is proof that Art has become an open-market commodity. In spite of this, his fate and survival still rest with the dealer and curator. They remain his best hopes for fame, and food.

The growing education of the mind of the public at large has naturally also reached art and is now reaching out for architecture. But art and architecture need just as much necessary incubation time as the growth of an embryo. If prematurely born, it must be put into an incubator. Perhaps most of our galleries, and museums are incubators.

How deeply can the mind penetrate the nucleus of art's creativity? I believe it cannot at all, and remains forever in the outer orbits. But if it could, wouldn't the followers of Gutenberg—readers, researchers, teachers, professors, critics, historians—be the best *knowers* of art? But they are not. They only know facts; not *the* facts, but facts. Facts do not make art; Art transforms them. They are mutated from one corporeality into another corporeality. No mystery. These *are* facts. Such transfiguration only can be apprehended when not blocked by terminological interference. The irrational cannot be vivisected by the rational. In human relations, understanding and love are the result of a living experience and not matter of touch, and go. The Parthenon is only alive on the Acropolis, not in photostats or on TV.

The one good thing galleries can claim is that they confront the student, face to face, with an original.

But how well are these prepared for a meeting of the heart and soul? Is art, that has distilled its being to "esthetics *in abstracto*," the type of art that a populace at large can feel and adopt? Does not the trend of cultural fashion push its way way ahead of dream and need? And the appraisal of the *extraordinary* goes with it hand in hand. He is indispensable because he is the rope to which the cluster of the other artists must cling. They are raised higher, and higher. More of them hang on until he has reached the solar of myth. The rest of the cluster remains below, in his shadow. Thus the extraordinary becomes an idol. He is admired, but rarely understood or loved. The unique is not everybody's business. He has a Chinese wall around him. Impenetrable. His solitude is inwardly endless; our solitude is longing outward.

There is only one way to reach the populace in art—to reach them, to reach the exclusive individual, the scholar and the school, through the elimination of the *willful*. Extraordinary, in rebuilding the content, the meaning of the arts. This is everybody's business, not in time to come, but now. However, as I mentioned before, we live in an interregnum: between two times. We have missed the train which left four hundred years ago, and the new one has not yet arrived. The waiting room of art is full of people.

A gallery's life is within its home—endless. Coming back from the painter's world or the sculptor's or the architect's to one's own world, and from there again reaching out for the fruit of the creative artist, there is a never-ending cycle of correlation. What else could the space and place of a gallery be but a planetary system of continuous relation between the work of the Artist, and its potential Lover?





There, too, is "continuous tension," and the prize: peace after marriage is won.

And silence can be heard again.

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Unbekannter Fotograf: *unknown photographer*

Friedrich Kiesler, New York, 1940er Jahre

*Frederick Kiesler, New York, 1940s*



# Some Notes on Show Windows

Which is the most provocative: The curiosity to look into a neighbor's window or the window which lures us to look in?

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We are all window shopping. The difference between you and Mrs. X. is that Mrs. X. may do it consciously (lounging along the streets), while you and I are deep in thought about so important details of business matters and are unconsciously looking into faces and windows.

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Let us consider, for the sake of speed, that both curiosity and the desire to lure have been born at the same time. Of unknown parents. Now you have purchaser and merchandise. So close, and yet so far apart. Why is their union so constrained?

Some transparent but insurmountable wall separates the two. Unsympathetic tastes? The barrier of prices? How difficult becomes the problem of getting what one wants!

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If only one could say, "Grab it!" I certainly admire those thieves and racketeers who get what they want, and whom you couldn't coerce into stealing that which they do not like.

They are straightforward. They have courage. Neither the house detective nor the price hold terrors for them. We fear everything, even the differing taste of merchandise. We are perpetually creating inhibitions for ourselves, laws for private and official use. We have built a whole civilisation in order to legalize our fears and give them social standing. We must balance ourselves between our fears, and still walk upright on a tight rope in this very sad circus of our world.

One might go so far as to term our fear complex-refinement. Without its restraining influence, ours would be a life of the savage.

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Consider the proportions of a show window frame. Here alone, a great effect can be achieved. Place a small window in a broad, sheer surface or wall. It will draw every passing glance. The display store Pinet has done it.

Face about: ponder the other extreme, a window encompassing the front of a store building. Your effect will compare with the first suggestion, but your problem becomes that of conceiving a proper merchandise display within an unusual height, and width. The automobile firm Renaud Frerès, in Paris, has done it successfully.

Whatever your course in choosing the proportions for a window, avoid one thing: the normal. In life, the normal intelligence must clothe itself in a high culture to attain distinction. Such a state





needs intense preparation, work, and work, sacrifice, friendships, travel, knowledge accumulated by all available means. This distinction is a tedious accomplishment for those speeding through life at four hundred miles an hour.

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A sort of secret service to you would be to tell you how to make a normal window look different. Lower the valance to a dead point. Very low. Utilize one plain color. No ornament. Display very few pieces of merchandise, perhaps only one or two (a hat, scarf and bag). Use the deep valance to hide a strong flood light. The light must further isolate, and accentuate the display.

Repeat the valance idea vertically for different effect. Insert side valances of irregular size. Let the left side be smaller than the right. Now, your window becomes an oblong opening. One little caution: imagine yourself a passerby looking into the window sidewise, back of the valances. That is poor workmanship. Avoid this possibility. Shift one side wing (the smaller one) back from the plate glass. Next, move back the bigger wing also, but less. You might even turn it slightly sidewise.

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Another thought comes to mind. It concerns those continuous, horizontal windows which appear almost too frequently in modern architecture. When are we going to see them introduced in display window design? Continuous small windows on eye level are especially good to lead the passerby around a corner, or into an entrance. Divide your

show window into three horizontal parts. Cover the upper, and lower division with valances. The central panel remains for your display.

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Why doesn't the show window hold, instead of a display—a play? A stage play. Where Mr. Hat, and Miss Glove are partners. The window a vertical peepshow stage. Let the street be your auditorium with its ever-changing audience. Has nobody tried to conceive plays for merchandise? Pantomime or abstract. Silent. Mechanized or real. Or talking. Certainly, people have. But storeowners are apprehensive. They remember the day of the strong man who demonstrated garters, harvesting twisted smiles from passersby. The thing is not *what* you are doing, but *how*. Make the presentation refined. That's all. Here is a new field for presentation, one to which I can merely point out the entrance.

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Perhaps my thought is heresy but sometimes I must wonder if the show window has not outlived itself.

When those semi-Asiatic Europeans invented the show window, they had reason for it. Stronger reason than mere selling. Entertainment during leisurely walks. Two hours for lunch. Corso. Lounging while lunching. Meeting friends. Terraced boulevard cafés. Walking not motoring; talking not shouting; living not acting.

Do we have time for show windows? Swarming morning crowds; impetuous lines in lunchrooms. That weary hour before dinner. Our evenings: after the theater, have you watched the throng moving like





a black stream, coherent one to the other? A single mass of emigrants in the land of sorrows, and unbeloved labor (habit-convicted labor) gazing straight into the million lights of advertising with eyes that no longer react.

Very well! Invent something to supersede show windows. Something new, something more appropriate and profitable! For instance: if jaded crowds disregard merchandise displays, abolish displays! Let the windows harbour a merchant's commission which *will* regard each passerby. Let this jury comprise an inescapable network. Let it be strategic, planned, organized, per square foot of the city, land and globe. Let each passerby be inspected. Should the jury decide that he needs a new hat, new shoes, or an entire new wardrobe, arrest time, compel him to make a selection from a uniform stack comprised of three or less materials, styles, and colors. No extravagance. No delivery. No C. O. D. The state demands. World prosperity demands it. Disobedience means expulsion.

That would be modern. Truly modern; not modernistic. Speed. Cooperation. Efficiency.

No, I think it was a bad mood of mine, writing this. It isn't true. We are alright. The merchants are alright. The stores are alright. The show windows are alright. Everything is quite alright. Let's go on:

Once all-important, the background tumbles from its eminence. Modern line and form have done their uttermost to attract attention to decoration and to detract from merchandise. There was no escaping until the "modernist ballyhoo" was quelled. Every decorator sipped the same nectar. Now we are sober, and our throbbing brains tell us ruefully that the public cannot be lured with a red—with

a modernistic—flag. It does not stir itself. To the contrary, modernistic embroideries repel it. Merchandise returns as its own best salesman.

For the background, design will become more and more restrained. Much talking has been done about the new materials to be used in so-called modern decoration and architecture. I wonder if Frank Lloyd Wright would fail to make a modern building by using those simple materials, brick, straw, and stones? Would Mr. X., Mr. Y., or Mr. Z., architects and display men, be more successful using walls of glass and aluminium, and floors of cellophane?

Submerging the background, the display man must concentrate on display fixtures. Plate glass fixtures give an entire new effect to the windows of Saks Fifth Avenue store. You wouldn't have believed that fixtures would do the trick? Yes, if they are excellently conceived. Plates of glass in different sizes of width, and height, places in grooved wooden blocks. In combination of two or three, they form low tables, high tables, hangers, shelves. They are so simple. Yet inexpensive.

Next will be the use of plate glass in different colors.

Go further. Build the whole window thus. Sliding sheet material. Horizontally sliding, vertically crossing. Stops at any level. Forward. Backward. Someone is going to come to it sooner or later. The results will be laudable. Inexpensive and of perfect beauty. Always the same, always different. Modern. A companionate linking between the two: the merchandise, and the purchaser.

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Unpublished typescript, 1938.