

Summaries in English

Objektyp: **Group**

Zeitschrift: **Das Werk : Architektur und Kunst = L'oeuvre : architecture et art**

Band (Jahr): **44 (1957)**

Heft 3: **Geschäfts- und Verwaltungsbauten**

PDF erstellt am: **22.07.2024**

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The Modernization of our Cities

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The term "city", which has also become current in German Switzerland, is used here in its English sense, that is, it does not refer at all to the old quarter but, as in London, to the business centre. In our more important cities, the business centre has become increasingly adapted to modern requirements. Unfortunately, this modernization is generally carried out on a private ownership basis, usually entailing buildings flush with the pavement, with interior courtyards, and not in any respect in harmony with a unified city-planning conception. The three examples published in this issue are welcome exceptions to this tendency. It is to be hoped that the idea of regrouping plots of land is applied also in cities. City-planning would gain by it, and, on the economic side, the parties concerned would by no means lose by it.

Plan of "Zur Palme" Office Building, Zurich

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M. E. Haefeli, W. M. Moser and R. Steiger, arch. FAS/SIA, Zurich, in collaboration with the late F. Mössinger and A. Studer, arch. SIA

This plan comprises an 11-storey central section above a ground floor in glass given over to shops and also a first floor, and a terrace intended as a parking area. The main building is composed of wings disposed in the shape of a star, which gives all the windows an outside view. The 2 uppermost floors are reserved for flats, each occupying 2 floors. If this plan were realized, it would be a great stimulus to the modernization of the entire district.

Administration Building of the "Mutuelle Vaudoise Accidents", Lausanne

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1953-1955, arch. Prof. J. Tschumi SIA/FAS, Lausanne

This important building was required to be integrated into the beautiful grounds of the Chêne estate, and an attempt was made to bring the building at all points in direct contact with the natural beauty of the grounds. - The building, in the form of an open right angle, comprises a central structure with the main entrance (the latter on account of its considerable distance from the trees separating it from the street is clearly recognizable by an overhanging aluminium roof projecting from the elevation) and a lateral structure, with the garage entrance. The large lobby, glazed and admitting grass plots and clumps of shrubbery, looks out over the Lake of Geneva. - Main organizational idea: What was aimed at was a complete liberation of the interior, in the sense that it is possible, owing to a few supporting walls and points of support, to set up as desired movable partitions, solid, transparent or translucent; it was sought, moreover, to create the best possible working conditions (sound insulation and ventilation without opening the windows); finally, the Treasurer's Office and the Mail Room, located at the intersection of the two structures, are tied in with all the essential departments. - On the 3rd floor, a terrace contains a garden above which there will be hung a large ornamental panel. - Careful attention devoted to the colour scheme of the floors and walls, with vivid accents here and there, and furniture designed in harmony with the large-scale architectural plan.

Decoration of the "Mutuelle Vaudoise Accidents", Lausanne

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The competition in which the decoration for this building is chosen has the following features: 1. It is to comprise a large number of works (2 large panels, 2 mural paintings, 2 sculptures); 2. In contrast to the ordinary procedure, it is to have clearly defined in what spirit the architect wished to have each of the works in question executed, the artists in this way being invited to collaborate intimately with the creator of the entire building so as to achieve a better synthesis of architecture and the other arts.

Administration Building of the Transport Insurance Co., Basle

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1954/56, Hermann Baur, arch. FAS/SIA, Basle, in collaboration with Hanspeter Baur, arch., Basle

This building is interesting from the city-planning point of view in that the main structure, 10 stories high, is not aligned with the street but is set at an angle to it, the resulting courtyard forming a prolongation of the strip of lawn along the street, while the whole establishes an organic link between the Swiss Federal Railways Station and the city of Basle. The architecture is deliberately functional, but care has been taken to achieve the right proportions and good lines. - The garden courtyard was created by Paul Speck; the stained glass in the lobby is by Paul Stöckli.

"Rautatalo" Office Building, Helsinki

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1951-1954, arch. Prof. Alvar Aalto, Helsinki

"Rautatalo" means in Finnish iron house. The plan, which won a prize in 1951, and followed up by complementary studies, has taken into account the city-planning requirement that it be integrated with its surroundings; it has done so in spite of the fact that construction in metal is always conceived from within. As the ground is 80 cm. below sea level, no time was wasted in placing a concrete slab to serve as foundation. The double concrete skeleton of the building has been given a light metal sheathing (copper); the roof is also of copper. The basic idea was to create in the centre of Helsinki an office building which is functional and at the same time has good lines.

Piet Mondrian in New York

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by Michel Seuphor

Mondrian lived the last three and a half years of his life in New York, where he had two apartments both on the 4th floor, both commanding a view at night out over the lights of the enormous city. Mondrian lived there like an ascetic in his cell, but an ascetic of the beautiful, of a beauty stripped down to its essentials, to the absolute. During his second year in New York, Mondrian's painting went through a decisive transformation which his most ardent admirers of his Paris period do not seem to have sufficiently understood. People have talked of his old age. In reality, it is an old age in the spirit of Goethe or Michelangelo. Moreover, the artist had gone to a new continent and discovered a dynamic, open world: the New World. Hence, and he has been so sharply criticized for this! the progressive disappearance in his last canvases ("New York City", "Broadway Boogie-Woogie", "Victory Boogie-Woogie"), of black lines, then of all lines to delimit the colours. Not at all a renunciation of his principles, but really a good-natured achievement of what can be called a sublime symphony radiating idealism and youth.

Lynn Chadwick

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by J. P. Hodin

The highest international award for sculpture of the Biennale of Venice 1956, presented to the Englishman Lynn Chadwick (born 1914), has signalled the importance of this artist, the most remarkable British sculptor since Henry Moore. He is a native Londoner and was a pupil in the Merchant Taylor School; he intended to become an architect. He was a naval aviator during the war, and after the end of the hostilities, began to work on "mobiles"; first exhibition in London in 1950; in 1951 he took a prize in the International Competition for the "Monument to the Unknown Political Prisoner"; created 3 works for the Festival of Britain; the British Council subsequently exhibited his works in the USA, Canada and Germany; his works are to be seen in the Tate Gallery, in the Museum of Modern Art in New York, in Buffalo and in Australia. - Modern English sculpture commands much more international attention than does English painting. Chadwick's generation, also including among others Reg Butler, is distinguished by its refusal to work either in the spirit of the closed form of Brancusi or in that of the open form of Moore. It prefers to concern itself, rather, with the possibilities of metamorphoses of structures. Chadwick possesses a metaphysical, dynamic spirit, along with certain elements of expressionism, enabling him to create, usually in metal, his own world of shapes in which elements of pure animality expressing the Darwinian conception of the struggle for existence is fused with the anguish of a Kierkegaard or a Kafka.