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The 50th Anniversary of the Swiss Werkbund

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by Alfred Roth

In a convention to be held on October 25–27, 1963, the members of the Swiss Werkbund will celebrate the 50th anniversary of the organization. The first day will be devoted to the impending legalization of apartment ownership and to the formal problems related thereto; the second day will be taken up with the question of the renovation of historic old cities and the juxtaposition of buildings of various styles; finally, the third day of the meeting will have as its theme the design of everyday objects of practical use as conditioned by the growth of mass consumption and the rapid desuetude of designs subject to fluctuations in style. On the occasion of this 50th Anniversary there is being organized among the architects of the SWB and the members of Œuvre a competition with a view to the renovation of a building in the historic centre of Zurich. The results will be shown during the convention at the Museum of Applied Arts in Zurich.

Record of the Werkbund from 1913 to 1963

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by Eugen Gomringer

This shows the growth of the Werkbund from its foundation in 1913 and that of its publication, WERK, in 1914. All problems, theoretical and practical, are dealt with: the debate between applied art and industrial production; the challenges presented by the economic crisis; opposition to Fascist bogus monumentality and to pseudo-popular art; the achievement of an international level after 1945 and, finally, a position regarding "modernism" and "styling".

After Fifty Years

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by Werner Blaser, Lucius Burckhardt and Antonio Hernandez

These articles, by confronting the development of modern design and the dogmas of the avant-garde, bring out the fact that the manifold requirements of life and society cannot be codified neatly within any single theory. Parallel to the development in time there appear all the ramifications of the various trends. The absence of style in technical design is becoming itself a style and the renunciation of decoration in itself a form of decoration.

Technology, function, design: The theory of the technically perfect object applies only to the tool; everything else is subject to economic laws and to fashion.

Housing: The economic crisis called into being "minimal housing", out of which prosperity has made a sales slogan.

Proportion, structure, decoration: After the modern pioneers had eliminated decoration and sought to rediscover pure proportions, the artificial rebirth of aesthetic Platonism will engender a kind of superficial architectural cosmetics.

Alignment and geometry: The repetition of the same element retains its attractiveness, especially in staggered layout.

Formal invention: The desire to get as close as possible to perfection is contrary to the needs of industry, where formal invention is often extremely superficial.

Concerning style and the out-of-date: A problem that has come up all through the history of the Werkbund. What has come of the dictum of Hermann Muthesius: "One should not buy less, but less often"?

Compensations: Against the background of an architecture that is genuinely technological or only pseudo-technological there proudly strut designs which are nothing but playful gestures: either hand-me-down formulas or what could be called architectural eroticism.

The future: Continued prosperity and mass production can increase comfort, but they have squandered urban sites and desecrated the outskirts. To counter this trend will be the job of those organizations loyal to the aims of the Werkbund.

An Architecture of Chance?

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by Georg Schmidt

The author, one of the first champions of modern art and for a long time director of the Art Museum of Basle, analyses the article devoted to the same subject by Benedikt Huber (WERK 7/1963). With reference to the examples reproduced in that issue, he shows how many elements there meet a functional requirement in the sense in which this was understood in the 'twenties, and he expresses his conviction that it is at the present time more indispensable than ever to impart to young architects a theory of aesthetics that welcomes the application of technology to building.

The Marionettes of Sophie Taeuber for "King Stag" of Gozzi, 1918

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At the time of the Zurich Werkbund Exhibition of 1918 there was founded the Swiss Marionette Theatre, which, aided by the teachers of the School of Applied Arts in Zurich, lasted until 1935. For the first season, artists from all over Switzerland, including Henry Bischoff, Alexandre Cingria, Louis Moilliet and Otto Morach, invented marionettes and scenery. The most significant, and even by today's standards the most modern in the best sense of the word, is still the creation of Sophie Taeuber for "King Stag" by Carlo Gozzi.

The Textile Art in Switzerland during the last Fifty Years

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by Erika Billeter

The revival of the applied arts throughout Europe at the beginning of the 20th century had a fruitful influence as well on textile art. In Switzerland, a country which in this field inherits a long tradition, the beginning of this modern development is marked by the personal impact of Sophie Taeuber, who, starting in 1916, took over the textile class in the School of Applied Arts in Zurich, where she strove to create a style of decoration based on geometric structures. Her ideas influenced Swiss textile production until well after the second decade of the century. At the present time, Elsi Giauque conducts the same class, and she is no less influential. As for tapestry, this art was renewed around 1930 under the influence of the painter E.L. Kirchner and it has been advanced by the genuinely original works of Marie Geroe-Tobler and Lissy Funk.