

138

THE MUSEUM OF MODERN ART

11 WEST 53RD STREET, NEW YORK 19, N. Y.

TELEPHONE: CIRCLE 5-8900

47426-17

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

NELSON A. ROCKEFELLER OPENS ART CONFERENCE AT MUSEUM OF MODERN ART

WALDO FRANK AND WALTER GROPIUS ADDRESS CONFERENCE

Nelson A. Rockefeller, President of the Museum of Modern Art, welcomed members of the Committee on Art Education from all over the country to the Committee's 5th Annual Conference Saturday morning, April 26th in the Museum's auditorium. More than 600 persons attended the conference and its various sessions and hundreds more were turned away because of lack of space. Mr. Rockefeller spoke of the significance of the Conference to this country and the role of this country in the world today. He said in part:

"As the center of world gravity shifts politically, economically and socially to the United States, the responsibility for the cultural life of our own community and the world becomes greater. As the United States finds itself thrust into the position of world leader, it is particularly fortunate that internally we are reaching maturity and it is important to lead the country to the stimulation of creative impulses at all age and education levels. Since the war the world has begun to realize that there is a growing cultural life in the United States and it is our responsibility--- the responsibility of such individuals and groups as are meeting here today--- to see that the United States becomes a creative, dynamic force in the cultural life of the world."

Victor D'Amico, Director of the Museum's Education Program, is chairman of the Art Committee and introduced the speakers. He explained the purpose of the conference as "the improvement and encouragement of creative education at all levels in and out of school," and stated that this 5th Annual Conference is actually a beginning for "we are here to make a blueprint for future action. Art is now the property of everyone and plays a vital role in the community and in the world community. UNESCO has emphasized the role of art is to further understanding between nations and human beings."

Art an Antidote for World Disaster

Mr. D'Amico introduced the first speaker, Waldo Frank, critic and novelist, who spoke in part as follows:

"None of us is quite sure whether we stand on the brink of a new world or on the brink of disaster. We stand on both. Awareness of our nearness to disaster is responsible for our neglect of basic thinking and experience which alone can avoid disaster. Art can be a basis of thought and life, which tends away from disaster, for art is a constant creative activity whereby the individual finds the experience of belonging to the universe. The function and experience of art give us the security and strength coming from the realization that we are an experiencing part of the whole.

"The work of the art teacher can be of tremendous importance if it is based on an active philosophy of life with art as a function of it. But

it is necessary to have: awareness of the emotional and intellectual problems of people in our society; creation of a consciousness of the real forces of society in which people live; awakening of a critical awareness of the kind of art in the newspapers, radio, movies, etc.; a feeling of the sanctity and importance of what people move toward when they are interested in art. The old individualism, that of self-sufficiency, is gone. It was false anyway. In today's collectivized society, our one hope is to introduce a new integer, 'the Person' as distinct from the old concept of the 'individual'. 'The Person' is an individual who has grown into the consciousness of connectedness with life. He finds the universe, the world, the cosmos, within himself. This integer 'the Person' could modulate the awareness of connectedness into group activities and the group activities widen to include the nation. Our new world is one in which man can live because the whole man lives."

Gropius States Design Moves from 3rd to 4th Dimension

Walter Gropius, world famous architect and Chairman of the Department of Architecture at the Graduate School of Design, Harvard University, was next introduced by Mr. D'Amico. Mr. Gropius spoke on "Topics of Design", making it clear at the beginning that his use of the term "design", "broadly embraced the whole orbit of man-made visible surroundings, from simple everyday goods to the complex pattern of a whole town."

Mr. Gropius said in part:

"Sensation comes from us, not from the object which we see. If we can understand the nature of what we see and the way we perceive it, then we will know more about the influence man-made design can have on human feeling and thinking.

"My thesis is that artistic creation draws its life from the mutual tension between the subconscious and the conscious faculties of our existence, that it fluctuates between reality and illusion. Here, I believe, we have clues from where an educator in design can find his approach, namely to develop it on the basis of objective optical facts common to all of us, instead of subjecting his own subjective sensations into the student's mind. The study of what is reality and what is illusion presupposes a fresh mind, unaffected by the accumulated debris of intellectual knowledge. Thomas Aquinas has said 'I must empty my soul that God may enter!' That is the state of mind for creative conception. But our present intellectually emphasized book education does not promote such mental climate. The initial task of a design teacher should therefore be to free the student from his intellectual frustration by encouraging him to trust his own subconscious reactions and to try to restore the unprejudiced receptivity of his childhood. He must guide him to step the resurrection of conscious prejudices and the relapse into imitative action by helping him to find a common denominator of expression to be derived from his own observation and experience. If design is a specific language of communication between individuals then it must have its own elementary alphabet of scale, form and color. It needs its own grammar of composition to integrate these elements into a message of meaning, expressed in its own terms of the senses, which link man to man even closer than words do. The more this visual language of communication is spread the better will be the common understanding. This is a task of education. We have to learn what influences the psyche of man in terms of light, scale, form and color. (What is atmosphere of a building or room?). From the solid ground of observations, leading to objective conclusions, the student of design must learn to see, he must know the effect of optical illusions, the psychological influence of shapes, of colors and textures, the effect of contrast, direction, tension and repose, and he must learn the meaning of human scale.

"In our search for the human scale the size of our own body, of which we are always conscious, serves as a yardstick when we perceive our surroundings. We try to construct a finite framework of relationships

within the infinite space. The emotional interest of a spectator will fade or be intensified when we decrease or increase the optical scale of an object.

"I remember the intense physical horror I experienced once when seeing, on a screen, the enlarged picture of a scorpion and a mantis, appearing as huge monsters, tearing each other to pieces in a gruesome life and death struggle. Merely through an enlargement of the optical scale, causing a closer emotional relation, strong physical and psychological sensations sprang up which would not have occurred had I seen the fight in its original small scale.

"All this must bring us to the conclusion that it lies in the grasp of the designer to organize the psychological effect of his creations at will by increasing its scale or that of its parts. When the Aztecs or the Egyptians built a pyramid their intention was to create awe and fear of God. An expression of the supernatural through large scale was striven for by the designer. The Caesars, playing God, intending to subjugate their subjects by fear, expressed their power by megalomaniac axes of superhuman scale. Hitler and Mussolini both received in rooms of colossal size, seated at the opposite end from the entrance; the approaching visitor was made to feel uneasy and humble.

"In the Middle-West a nursery has been built in such a way that each playroom corresponds with the size of each age group of children - its doors, windows, cupboards, hooks. This has proved to be a surprising success. It puts the children at ease and stimulates their initiative and activity.

"The shift in the basic conception of our world from static space to continually changing relationships is slowly engaging our mental and emotional faculties of perception. For instance, it makes us understand the endeavors of futurists and cubists who first tried to seize the magic of the fourth dimension, of time, by depicting motion in space. The attempt to interpret the approach of the modern designer as a mere rational one is certainly nonsensical. For the logic implied in a design is only a part of its complex process. The underlying philosophy of the modern pioneers has made it very clear that genuine design - beyond the fulfillment of a practical purpose by human intellect and calculation - must give emotional satisfaction, that it is a product of human desire and passion.

"The designer needs an inexhaustible source of stimulation in his search for the display of the grand and the beautiful. Where is such a source? Creative imagination seems to stem from moral devotion. We find inspiration from new social ideas for the betterment of the human environment, for a more highly integrated community. The artist anticipates the future. Understanding the social necessities of civilized life is the first indispensable precondition for good design. If a designer is not imbued with passion to search for the better solution, if he thinks in terms of how to earn his livelihood only, he is sunk as an artist. Only if he aims at creating a relevant contribution, born of his own thinking and imagining, can he gather strength to act as the unifying coordinator of the many engaged in building up a new environment. Thus he needs to be bold: He must see his problems big, for good design embraces the whole of life through construction thought, including everything that could enrich its pattern.

"This social urge then, as we might call it, should be the omnipresent stimulant of design. For knowledge of scientific facts, in construction, in draftsmanship, in representation, are all but auxiliary implements of the designer to express that all important and social end of his creative effort. Without such spiritual tendency his stature as a responsible man and citizen cannot reach maturity. In short, good design is not only a mental affair, it must be fired with emotion - to stir the heart.

But hearts must be made receptive -- that is to say, we have to reevaluate our values. The ranking order of professional reputation in the different countries is extremely indicative. In one of the oldest countries, China, the artist and the scholar rank first; then comes the farmer, the businessman; and the soldier ranks last. In our country, no doubt the businessman is top-ranking, and the scholar and the artist way down on the list. Can this be a good setting for a future culture? The businessman certainly can lead a

society of expediency, but culture needs the spiritual leadership of the artist, the poet, the thinker. Education then, has to build up that spiritual receptivity from which culture may grow. Art is to be put in the center of our educational curricula as the most desirable ferment for a good life. From here society can regenerate and so will the shapes of new things to come."