

# THE MUSEUM OF MODERN ART

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## SIGNS IN THE STREET SUBJECT OF MUSEUM OF MODERN ART EXHIBITION

SIGNS IN THE STREET, the aspect of daily life most recently surveyed by the Museum of Modern Art, is the subject of an exhibition in the Museum's first floor galleries and garden at 11 West 53 Street from March 24 through May 2. Experimental signs using new materials and special color lighting, familiar signs from our urban centers and highways and signs using symbols and lettering from Europe will be shown in actual examples shipped to the Museum from various parts of the world and in enlarged photo-murals and color slides.

To point up the two-fold problem of signs, legibility and appearance, the exhibition opens with a photo-mural of the southwest corner of Fifth Avenue and 53 Street as a typical example of the chaos of signs in our streets today. In this picture a multitude of signs, conflicting in shape, lettering and message are ranged vertically on a single lamp post. Difficult to read and unattractive to look at, the signs in the photo-mural are presented as an example of what has happened as the number of signs and instructions in our streets has increased as our cities have grown. The other signs in the exhibition were selected as examples of effective solutions to the problem posed here.

Because at night lighted signs dominate the architecture of our cities and create a new environment, one gallery in the exhibition is devoted to color slides showing six outstanding examples of good lighted signs. These include a sign using symbols in neon lights by the well-known designer Gyorgy Kepes for a radio store, designed by Carl Koch, in Boston and a proposed sign for Lever House in New York designed by Alexey Brodovitch, art director. The sign for the Barton candy store at 42nd Street and Seventh Avenue, for the Mutual Life Building at Broadway and 54th Street and a Shell Oil Company sign will be shown in this gallery as well as the sign for the Olivetti store in San Francisco. These signs were selected as examples of good signs serving a wide variety of purposes.

As arrows and hands have been used for centuries as directional symbols, one wall of the exhibition shows six lively examples of these symbols from Europe.

The variations possible in combining a new material --Plexiglas-- with unusual color lighting and well designed letters are shown in the exhibition in a "Wall of Letters" designed by Alvin Lustig and executed in white Plexiglas by the Rohn and Hass Company. This is shown as an example of the high standards of design

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possible for letter forms utilizing a comparatively new material and carefully selected color.

In the garden next to the glass wall of the gallery five actual signs will be erected. These include the London Transport symbol-sign, the Shell Oil Company gasoline symbol-sign, the CBS "eye" symbol-sign by William Golden, a directional symbol-sign designed by Alvin Lustig for Northland, the new shopping center near Detroit, and Woolworth's familiar red and gold sign, an example of 19th century lettering used effectively.

In the large gallery photographs of these signs in their settings will be shown along with photographs of nine other signs in streets here and abroad. One letter from each sign will be painted on the wall over each photograph in order to dramatize the subtle variations of the basic Roman letter developed by various artists, architects and designers.

The signs in this section of the exhibition include: the PSFS Building in Philadelphia by the architect George Howe; the lettering designed by Gerhardt Severain for a building by Mies van der Rohe in Barcelona; the Mid-Wilshire Medical Building sign in California designed by the architect Victor Gruen; the Olivetti sign used in San Francisco as well as in their other stores here and abroad; the famous vertical Bauhaus sign on the school in Germany designed by Gropius; the United Kingdom symbol designed by Sir Hugh Casson; a cafe bar sign from England and a Danish sweet shop sign; the Bonniers store sign in New York designed by the architect Harold Leeds; and the Abby Aldrich Rockefeller Garden lettering designed by the famous Dutch Museum Director W.J.H.B. Sandberg.

The exhibition is under the direction of Philip C. Johnson, Director of the Museum's Department of Architecture and Design, and Mildred Constantine, Associate Curator. It is the culmination of a project initiated last fall by a student collaborative at the Yale School of Art and a professional conference sponsored by the Museum and Yale University in New Haven. The exhibition itself has been made possible by the co-operation of Rohm and Haas Company.

In connection with the exhibition, a symposium will be presented by the Museum's Junior Council;

SIGNS IN THE STREET

in the Penthouse of the Museum of Modern Art  
Wednesday, March 31, 1954, at 8:40 p.m.

Speakers will include: Philip C. Johnson, Director of the Museum's Department of Architecture and Design, Moderator; Mildred Constantine, Associate Curator of the Department of Architecture and Design; Victor Gruen, architect; Paul M. Hollister, of R.H. Macy & Company; Gyorgy Kepes of M.I.T., artist and designer; Alvin Lustig, designer; and C. McKim Norton of the Regional Plan Association, Inc., of New York.

Tickets, available at the Museum of Modern Art, 11 West 53 Street, are \$1.25 for non-members and \$1.00 for members.