

THE MUSEUM OF MODERN ART

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No. 31
FOR RELEASE

More than 100,000 people in New Delhi, in a three week period, visited an exhibition of well-designed American and European household furnishings sent to India as a result of a unique venture in international cooperation by public and private agencies.

Government agencies involved in the exhibition, which will tour 9 cities in India during the next two years, are the National Small Industries Corporation, part of the Ministry of Commerce of India, which requested the show, and the USIA, which has provided a geodesic dome to house it. Private agencies are the Ford Foundation, whose financial contribution made the exhibition possible, and the Museum of Modern Art, New York, which selected the 350 objects for the show and prepared the catalog; George Nelson & Co., a New York architectural firm, designed the installation and the catalog.

Design Today in Europe and America includes chairs, lamps, china, glassware, kitchen utensils, textiles and tools from 13 countries. According to Mrs. Pupul Jayakar representing the Indian government at the opening on January 16, the purpose of her government's invitation was to focus attention on the vital problem of product design in terms of rapidly developing small-scale industry.

For the U.S. and the Western world, the problem of India's future development was recently described by C. Douglas Dillon, Under Secretary of State for Economic Affairs, as "the most important economic project we have anywhere in the world."

Mrs. Jayakar said that the exhibition was requested because recent years have witnessed a transformation in the social-economic life of India. "Improved communications, the breakdown of caste barriers, the carrying of an urban civilization through radio and cinema to the small town and distant village, the availability of power, the introduction of new machines, new materials, new tools, and new techniques, have led to a breakdown of the traditional pattern of production, altered the relationship between producer and consumer, and pose a challenge to the forms that underlie production and distribution in this country.

"For our industrial units to imitate the outer form of these objects, however, is to destroy the spirit with which the exhibition is presented. The exhibition has been conceived rather to stimulate enquiry and to focus attention on the urgent problem of product design and the comprehension of the nature and place of materials, tools, functions and disciplines, in the creation of objects of daily use.

"It is a challenge to democracy and an industrial society whether or not

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within its contours a great artisan tradition can flourish. The esthetic of a people is the sum product of the perceptions, sensibilities and disciplines of those who dictate and demand and create the master. It is only a demand for the valid and the beautiful that will create the valid and the beautiful."

The enthusiastic response of the Indian press was probably responsible, at least in part, for the large attendance. The Hindustani Times called the show "a really fine exhibition," while the Times of India said: "The Western world has combined utility with beauty." Commenting more directly on the economic purposes behind the show, the Statesman said: "Human hands and sweat can produce only a small fraction of the things that people need to live decently. Only machinery can satisfy the needs of the millions who inhabit the earth."

At the opening ceremonies in New Delhi, Manubhai Shah, Union Minister of Industry praised American and European design and pointed out the lessons for India: "This does not mean that we in India should produce exact replicas of these. Nothing would be farther from the results proposed to be achieved by the exhibition than to go in for blind imitation or copying. We in this country have a tradition of our own. We have to produce simple, artistic and beautiful designs for articles consistent with our way of life and suitable to our genius. The exhibition (should) stimulate thinking on our part and may suggest new ideas."

The exhibition itself was organized by the International Program of the Museum of Modern Art, directed by Porter A. McCray, and is one of more than fifty traveling shows it has sent abroad in the past few years. Mrs. Cable Senior, Associate Director of the Program, which is the most extensive of its kind in the United States, spent six weeks in India supervising the arrangements for the exhibition. The objects were selected by Greta Daniel, Associate Curator of the Museum's Department of Architecture and Design. Miss Daniel and Arthur Drexler, Director of that Department, prepared a catalog for the show which has been published in India.

At the conclusion of the two-year tour, the objects in the show will be used by the Indian government as a nucleus for a permanent design exhibition.