

# The Museum of Modern Art

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**THE OBJECT TRANSFORMED**, with an introduction by Mildred Constantine and Arthur Drexler. 40 pages, 40 illustrations. Paperbound, \$2.95. Published and distributed by The Museum of Modern Art, New York.

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Fork prongs become beckoning fingers; glass milk bottles are melted and titled "No Deposit No Return"; a mattress is burnt and becomes an "Archeological Find"; a radio is encased in a copper casket, forever silent; and a chair is mummified in fiberglass or sheathed in an opaque, taut plastic skin. These familiar household objects, radically altered in appearance and association, are illustrated and discussed in **THE OBJECT TRANSFORMED**, just published by The Museum of Modern Art.

Twenty-one artists and designers from eight countries have taken useful objects and changed them so that they no longer serve their original functions. The esthetic and psychological effects that these transformed objects create depend to some extent on our recognizing the originals within the transformation. Knowing that it was an authentic bottle or chair is necessary for a just appreciation of its new and non-utilitarian effectiveness.

Mildred Constantine, Curator of Design, and Arthur Drexler, Director of the Department of Architecture and Design, trace the origins of the changed object and the resulting reversals or transformations of psychic energy to the Surrealists. Man Ray's iron is studded with tacks, and Meret Oppenheim's teacup and saucer are covered with fur. Miss Constantine and Mr. Drexler note: "The emotional content we associate with any object depends on more than the object alone. Hidden associations may be revealed when one object is related to another, or otherwise taken out of its familiar context, or when even a single detail is removed or altered. If the resulting visual metaphor is sufficiently powerful, even the most ubiquitous artifact may be transformed into an object of emotional rather than practical utility: a work of art."

Most of the objects in this profusely illustrated book, which follows a recent Museum exhibition, were created during the 1960's. The transformations do nothing

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to enhance the objects in any conventional design sense, with the exception of Bruno Munari's clock, in which discs of colored plastic replace hands and numerals to make a kind of moving picture in which time is deprived of its urgency. More often, a transformation removes an object entirely from the realm of design, sometimes with extraordinary fervor. A book, for example, is usually a carefully made object that we are conditioned to handle with respect. Books by Jasper Johns, John Latham and Lucas Samaras upset this response by acts of destruction.

Almost as emotionally charged as books are household furnishings. Les Levine's captain's chair seems to struggle to emerge from a tautly stretched skin of shiny plastic, and Fabio de Sanctis' chair is shrouded in painted fiberglass. Tony Palladino's table-top radio is entombed by copper plates, and the mattress by Ralph Ortiz, gutted by fire and doused with water, is transformed by outright destruction. Other transformations, like Janet Cooper's cluster of sagging milk bottles and Bruno Munari's gesturing forks, are less violent and sometimes amusing; they neither add, subtract, nor obliterate, but merely deform.

"Like many ideas and images current in the theatre, the transformed object is an apparition of everyday reality. For the twentieth century, it may be the most appropriate kind of still life."

THE OBJECT TRANSFORMED illustrates 25 of the 30 objects in the Museum's exhibition and has a complete catalog of the show. It is \$2.95, paperbound, available at the Museum Bookstore or by mail from the Museum.

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Review copies, photographs and additional information available from Elizabeth Shaw, Director, and Patricia B. Kaplan, Assistant, Department of Public Information, The Museum of Modern Art, 11 West 53 Street, New York, N.Y. 10019. Circle 5-8900.