

GREY ART NYU GALLERY

For Immediate Release
June 12, 2017

Contacts
Ari Tiziani: ariana.tiziani@nyu.edu
212/998-6789

EXHIBITION EXAMINES PIVOTAL ROLES OF ALFRED BARR AND PHILIP JOHNSON AS AMBASSADORS OF MODERNIST DESIGN

Partners in Design: Alfred H. Barr Jr. and Philip Johnson

On view at NYU's Grey Art Gallery
September 7–December 9, 2017

New York University's Grey Art Gallery is pleased to present the first exhibition to focus on the groundbreaking collaboration between Alfred Barr, the Museum of Modern Art's first director, and Philip Johnson, its first curator of architecture. On view from September 7 through December 9, 2017, *Partners in Design: Alfred H. Barr Jr. and Philip Johnson* illuminates the roles played by these two pioneers of international modernism in promoting design and expanding its study to encompass quotidian objects. Their revolutionary vision inspired generations of museum professionals to encourage visitors to look at *everything* around them, not only paintings and sculpture, but also the products of everyday life. The show features some seventy objects—including furniture, decorative arts, textiles, industrial products, exhibition catalogues, and ephemera—which range from icons of modern design to rarely exhibited items. In short, *Partners in Design* explores the Bauhaus-inspired vision cultivated at MoMA shortly after its opening in 1929 and examines the museum's peerless efforts in the 1930s and '40s to promote a radical new aesthetic within modern American material culture.

Organized by the Liliane and David M. Stewart Program for Modern Design, Montreal, in collaboration with the Montreal Museum of Fine Arts, the show is curated by David A. Hanks. Hanks, the Stewart Program's curator, observes: "That modern design became a dominant esthetic in North America wasn't inevitable. Rather, it took the convergence of an emerging European design movement, a young museum, and a unique partnership—one that spanned fifty years, two continents, and countless conversations—to generate the modernism that to this day still says 'home' to millions of Americans." Grey Art Gallery director Lynn Gumpert adds, "As a laboratory for innovation in museum programming and pedagogy, the Grey is proud to present this important exhibition, focusing on two key individuals who revolutionized the way we appreciate and understand design, and helped shape the role of museums in collecting, researching, documenting, and promoting it."

Exhibition

Partners in Design is organized thematically. **The Bauhaus: “Mecca of Modernism”** opens the exhibition and introduces this seminal institution, which architect Walter Gropius founded in 1919 in Weimar, Germany. The school later moved to Dessau in 1925, and then Berlin, where it remained from 1930 to 1933. Barr visited the Bauhaus in 1927, and Johnson made repeated trips there between 1929 and its closing. They were most interested in the school’s Dessau period, where classrooms and workshops were housed in buildings designed by Gropius that embodied the new architecture of the industrial age and presented an ideal community for artists-craftsmen. This section includes an architectural model as well as rare brochures and catalogues, including those from MoMA’s *Bauhaus: 1919–1928*, which opened in 1938, and *Machine Art* of 1934. Also featured in this section is a Type K table lamp, designed by Christian Dell, a master of the Weimar Bauhaus metal workshop, along with the iconic B32 chair designed by Marcel Breuer, who studied and later taught at the Bauhaus. Both exemplify high design standards for mass production; indeed, B32 is still in production today.

Two displays—**The Barr and Johnson Apartments**—situate the first years of MoMA within the noisy and chaotic atmosphere of 1930s New York, where Barr and Johnson set out to popularize what they termed the International Style. The museum’s Department of Architecture, with Johnson at its head, presented its first exhibition in 1932: *Modern Architecture: International Exhibition*. This was followed in 1933 by *Objects: 1900 and Today*. With these shows, along with *Machine Art* in 1934, and the consumer-focused series *Useful Objects* from 1938 to 1949, Barr and Johnson established the promotion of modern architecture and design—including that of everyday objects—as a crucial component of MoMA’s influential agenda.

This section of the exhibition will debut new advances in technology that enable visitors, without the use of special glasses, to experience 3D simulations of Philip Johnson’s living room on East Fifty-second Street—Ludwig Mies van der Rohe’s first American commission in 1930—and Alfred Barr’s apartment at 2 Beekman Place. The technology reveals how the two men’s exploration of modernism extended to the design of their own residences. Johnson’s apartment, once described as “the most modern interior in America,” and Alfred Barr’s home served as laboratories where they could experiment with new designs. From 1930 to 1933, Barr and his wife, Margaret Scolari Barr, lived in an apartment directly above Johnson’s. The two friends were in and out of each other’s residences frequently and were said to have discussed architecture and design incessantly.

Objects in this section include a lamp and tubular steel chair designed by Johnson juxtaposed with original furniture designed by Marcel Breuer, and a remarkable dining table set designed by Donald Deskey from Barr’s apartment, shown alongside a sales catalogue of Deskey’s designs published by the Ypsilanti Reed Furniture Company of Michigan. This section also presents furniture by Mies van der Rohe and his partner, Lilly Reich, for Johnson’s New York apartment.

In another section of *Partners in Design*, ***Machine Art, 1934***, viewers encounter more than a dozen items from this seminal MoMA exhibition, which showcased the beauty of everyday industrial objects. Despite the uphill battle faced in popularizing rational, functional, streamlined aesthetics in an American culture more accustomed to ornament, the influential exhibitions organized by Johnson and promoted by Barr in the 1930s and ’40s indelibly shaped North American modern art and architecture. *Machine Art* toured nineteen venues in just four years, helping redefine museums’ missions and sparking significant interest in the International Style. Such efforts were instrumental in expanding appreciation of industrial objects. Featured here

are American products such as an Electrochef stove from c. 1930 and the sleek, industrial Monel sink designed by Gustav Jensen.

The exhibition's final section, **Spreading the Gospel of Modern Design**, features a broad range of domestic items—from furniture to textiles to housewares and beyond—created by American designers, including Charles and Ray Eames, Paul V. Gardner, Angelo Testa, and Eva Zeisel, that convey the new creative ideas then being generated in the U.S. This section also addresses the role of design in American society during World War II and the impact of European aesthetics and pedagogy on American manufacturing, thanks, in part, to the many European artists and architects who sought exile in the U.S. in the late 1930s and '40s. Pieces by influential international designers Alvar Aalto, Hans Bellman, Pierre Jeanneret, Bruno Mathsson, and others are featured as well.

Exhibition Catalogue

Partners in Design is accompanied by a richly illustrated catalogue. Edited by David A. Hanks, design historian and curator of the Liliane and David M. Stewart Program for Modern Design, Montreal, and published by The Monacelli Press, it is designed by the award-winning Montreal firm Paprika. The catalogue includes essays by Donald Albrecht, Curator at the Museum of the City of New York; Barry Bergdoll, Meyer Schapiro Professor of Art History at Columbia University and Curator of Architecture and Design at The Museum of Modern Art; Paul Galloway, a collection expert at MoMA; Mr. Hanks; and Juliet Kinchin, Curator of Architecture and Design at MoMA. Nathalie Bondil, Director and Chief Curator at the Montreal Museum of Fine Arts; Bruce D. Bolton, Executive Director of the Macdonald Stewart Foundation; and Phyllis Lambert, Founding Director Emeritus at the Canadian Centre for Architecture, all from Montreal, contributed prefaces.

Partners in Design: Alfred H. Barr Jr. and Philip Johnson
Edited by David A. Hanks; 240 pages. 200 illustrations.

Sponsorship

Partners in Design: Alfred H. Barr Jr. and Philip Johnson is organized by the Liliane and David M. Stewart Program for Modern Design, Montreal, in collaboration with the Montreal Museum of Fine Arts. The exhibition has signature organizational support from the Terra Foundation for American Art, as well as support from public and private funders, including the Birks Family Foundation and the Drummond Foundation. Support for the catalogue was provided by the Phyllis Lambert Foundation, the Council for Canadian American Relations, the Lee Anderson Memorial Foundation and Furthermore: a program of the J. M. Kaplan Fund. Funding for the presentation at the Grey Art Gallery is provided in part by the National Endowment for the Arts; New York State Council on the Arts with the support of Governor Andrew M. Cuomo and the New York State Legislature; Agnes Gund; Susan and Steven Jacobson; the Grey's Director's Circle, Inter/National Council, and Friends; and the Abby Weed Grey Trust.

About the Grey Art Gallery

The Grey Art Gallery is New York University's fine arts museum, located on historic Washington Square Park in New York City's Greenwich Village. It offers the NYU community and the general public a dynamic roster of engaging and thought-provoking exhibitions, all of them enriched by public programs. With its emphasis on experimentation and interpretation, and its focus on studying art in its historical, cultural, and social contexts, the Grey serves as a museum-laboratory for the exploration of art's environments.

Exhibitions organized by the Grey have encompassed all the visual arts: painting, sculpture, drawing and printmaking, photography, architecture and decorative arts, video, film, and performance. In addition to producing its own exhibitions, which often travel to other venues in the United States and abroad, the Gallery hosts traveling shows that might otherwise not be seen in New York and produces scholarly publications that are distributed worldwide.

General Information

Grey Art Gallery, New York University
100 Washington Square East, New York, NY 10003
Tel: 212/998-6780, Fax: 212/995-4024
E-mail: greyartgallery@nyu.edu
Website: greyartgallery.nyu.edu

Hours

Tuesday, Thursday, Friday: 11 am–6 pm
OPEN LATE Wednesday: 11 am–8 pm
Saturday: 11 am–5 pm
Sunday, Monday, and major holidays: Closed

Admission

Suggested donation: \$5; NYU students, faculty, and staff: free of charge