



DESIGN OBJECTS AND THE MUSEUM

EDITED BY
LIZ FARRELLY AND JOANNA WEDDELL

B L O O M S B U R Y

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PREFACE

Jonathan M. Woodham

In order to understand the distance that research, learning and teaching in design history has travelled over the past four decades and more – with all of its meandering byways, diversions and occasional off-road excursions – it is useful to review some elements of the mapping process. Such reflection also helps to clarify the ways in which a book such as *Design Objects and the Museum* is able to make a valuable contribution to theoretical, historical and curatorial discussions about the ways in which designed objects are addressed within the wider context of art and design history, object analysis and meaning, and museums and display.

In the mid-1970s, when the history of design emerged as an academic discipline that was seeking to establish its own distinctive place within the British higher education provision in the arts and humanities, there were a number of different considerations that both conditioned and challenged its standing. In this context a major location for early design historical research, curriculum design and teaching and learning design was to be found in the newly formed British Polytechnics (today's post-1992 universities) that, since the mid-1960s, were often formed through the amalgamation of local and regional colleges of art and design, technology and education. Indeed, a number of historians have seen this highly significant phase of educational change as one in which the history of design derived from a clear relationship with the changing requirements of art school education brought about as a consequence of the Coldstream¹ and Summerson² Reports. These had, in effect, brought about the compulsory introduction of historical and complementary studies that were seen to have an 'academic' content that raised the status of the existing broad-brush art and design curriculum from what was widely seen as worthy of a vocational award (the two-year National Diploma in Design – NDD) to the more substantive academic equivalent (the three-year Diploma in Art and Design – Dip.AD)³ of degree awards prevalent in other disciplines taught in the pre-1992 universities. Degrees commanded higher salaries in the teaching professions, and an employment destination for many of those completing courses in art and design.

However, the realities of these earlier years were more complex since the pedagogic intricacies of this period were greater than many written accounts have allowed:⁴ many of those involved with the contemporary curriculum development and teaching of, and research into, design history were graduates in art and architectural history in the 'old' university sector.⁵ A significant proportion had been trained in what came to be seen as conservative approaches to studies in visual and material culture with an emphasis on creative personalities, movements and styles,⁶ although within a comparatively short period of time the more challenging approach of what became known as the New Art History came into play.⁷ A number of others involved in shaping the design history agenda were drawn from a variety of other disciplinary origins. These included Gillian Naylor (1931–2014), who had read modern languages at Somerville College, Oxford University before working on the Council of Industrial Design's *Design* magazine in 1957, then under the editorship of Michael Farr,⁸ a former student of English taught by F. R. Leavis at the University of Cambridge. Naylor went on to a number of academic posts⁹ including Brighton College of Art and Design/Brighton Polytechnic between 1964 and 1971, Kingston Polytechnic, and the Royal College of Art where she was Professor. Farr had set up his own design management consultancy, Michael Farr (Design Integration) Limited, in central London in 1962¹⁰ and published his pioneering book on *Design Management* (1966). From the early 1970s, while still managing his consultancy, he was teaching design

history to all Multidisciplinary Design degree students at North Staffordshire Polytechnic before he was appointed to lead (1976–1987) the Swire School of Design in Hong Kong.¹¹ John Heskett (1937–2014) was also another formative voice in the development of the history of design¹² and brought yet another set of considerations to the table, having read economics, politics and history at the London School of Economics. This underpinned his interest in developing a wider design historical and design agenda embracing national identities, the State, and public organizations as well as the international growth and power of corporations. The museums sector was also represented in early discussions about the scope, nature and purpose of design history amongst what Penny Sparke described as ‘a group of academics based in several of Britain’s art schools (then part of the polytechnics . . .) who developed the discipline of design history and theory’.¹³ Complementing these was Carol Hogben, the Deputy Keeper of the Circulation Department¹⁴ at the Victoria and Albert Museum (V&A). Through its Travelling Exhibitions service, ‘Circ’ was responsible for loans of non-specialist art and design collections to regional museums and schools with the aim of educating the general public in the value of design.

Another contemporary phenomenon that provided a significant impetus in the early years of shaping the design history curriculum and research agenda was the work of key figures such as Tim and Charlotte Benton, Bridget Wilkins, Stephen Bayley, Stephan Muthesius, Peter Reyner Banham and Adrian Forty, all of whom had contributed to the pioneering Open University Course A305, *The History of Architecture and Design 1890–1939* (1975). Of particular note was that this course was supported not just by *Documents: a collection of source material on the modern movement*, but also by a Radiovision booklet to accompany a series of specially commissioned linked-in radio broadcasts, a similarly conceived set of television programmes that provided expert contemporary and historical critical commentary, as well as televisual ‘site visits’. Also part of this integrated audio-visual learning package were books of images and a wide variety of texts designed for distance learning. The latter were not only devoted to mainstream design movements of the period (such as the late Arts and Crafts, Art Nouveau, the Deutscher Werkbund, Modernism, Art Deco and Streamlining) but also included material on semi-detached suburban housing, the electric home and mechanical services.

Forty years on from such a launch pad of exciting possibilities we are now firmly embedded in the digital age with emergent research extending the scope of the digital humanities. However, the development of the design history curriculum has not perhaps made the quantum leaps that might have been expected in the years since the A305 curriculum was researched, produced, presented and consumed, especially given the production of hundreds of doctorates worldwide and more specialist journals that help to underpin and promote the field, most notably the *Journal of Design History* (1988–). It was suggested in 2013 that ‘with the publication of three key texts within the past two years design history “seems to have reached a certain level of maturity”’ (Huppatz and Lees-Maffei 2013); it was also considered that one of these, *The Design History Reader* (Lees-Maffei and Houze 2010) surveyed ‘the field, its methods and key themes’. The question might be raised as to how far it differed from earlier ‘readers’ and quotation and source books, particularly in relation to the range of authors and geographical locations selected for inclusion. To what extent was this work designed to accommodate a more pluralist approach to the teaching and learning of design history or histories, the significance of peripheries as well as centres, and reaching beyond the familiar and dominant Anglophone map that many researchers worldwide have sought to enhance?

In the context of this book, a positive sign of the maturity of design history might be the range of contributors. They come from a variety of stages of their research careers, from doctorands to seasoned professionals, drawing on academics, curators, museum professionals and archivists as well as designers and makers. This is in marked contrast to the earlier design historical world of the 1970s¹⁵ when there was a distinct lack of doctoral theses, dedicated journals, interest from publishers beyond celebrated designers, styles, movements and periods, and relative uncertainty about the range of primary source materials that were

Preface

most germane. Contributors to this book have been drawn from the UK, North America, Italy and Germany and the editors are engaged in collaborative research projects with the Research Department at the V&A and the Design Museum, London. Furthermore, the three themes of *Design Objects and the Museum* – The Canon and Design in the Museum, Positioning Design Within and Beyond the Museum, and Interpretation and the Challenge of Design – re-address, re-evaluate and considerably deepen our journeys into many of the territories that were first encountered as parts of the early, tentative steps of design history.

Notes

1. Sir William Coldstream became a major influence on British art education through chairmanship of the National Advisory Council for Art Education, which published two major documents that became known as the First and Second Coldstream Reports (1960 and 1970).
2. Sir John Summerson was appointed by the Ministry of Education in 1961 to chair the National Council for Diplomas in Art and Design (NCDAD) set up as an independent self-governing body to administer the award of diplomas (Dip.AD) available to students in colleges of art and design. The Summerson Report on Diplomas in Art and Design was published in 1964.
3. On top of a one-year Pre-Diploma course, making a four-year total overall.
4. See, for example Hazel Clark's 'Design History and British design education. An appraisal', in *Elisava: Temes de Disseny*.
5. For a fuller account of some of the background and opinions of a number of participants in the early phases of design history in Britain see 'The Design History Society Oral History Project'.
6. Some aspects of this evolution of the history of design have been related in D. J. Huppertz and G. Lees-Maffei's 'Why Design History? A multinational perspective on the state and purpose of the field', 2013, and J. M. Woodham's 'Recent Trends in Design History Research', 2001.
7. See, for example, W. J. T. Mitchell's foreword to a special issue of *Critical Inquiry*, 1989, devoted to the New Art History. See also J. Harris's *The New Art History: A Critical Introduction*, 2001.
8. Author of *Design in British Industry: A Mid-Century Survey*, 1955. The foreword was written by Nikolaus Pevsner who also oversaw the text that complemented his own *Enquiry into Industrial Art in England*, 1937.
9. At the Royal College of Art where Naylor became Professor of Design History and inspired several generations of design historians at Masters and PhD level.
10. In 1968 this became Farr Ergonomics Limited, using the same premises and staff on London's Tottenham Court Road.
11. The author, educated as a fine artist and art historian, was first acquainted with Farr's year-long compulsory design history in 1974, co-taught with Catherine Netherwood, an inspiring young textile designer who undertook many textile commissions for Heal's, London. He sat in on all their lectures and, following Farr's (and Netherwood's) departure to Hong Kong, took on the delivery of this course.
12. John Heskett was the author of the pioneering introductory text, *Industrial Design*, 1980, and several other defining texts that helped to shape an understanding of design in the everyday world.
13. See Penny Sparke's 'John Heskett Obituary' in *The Guardian*. Sparke was herself a leading light in the development of design history in its early years, at Brighton Polytechnic, before moving to the Royal College of Art in 1981 and then Kingston University where she took on a senior management role whilst continuing to research at a high level.
14. For a more complete and well-researched account of the V&A's Circulation Department see, for example, Joanna Weddell, 'Room 38A and beyond: post-war British design and the Circulation Department', in *V&A Online Journal*, 2012.
15. Some saw design history at degree-level (BA) and degree equivalent (Dip.AD) status in British higher education in the mid-1970s as a challenge to more established disciplines, particularly art history. At that time, when design

historians were looking for representation on the Association of Art Historians' executive committee as a means of strengthening their place in national higher education provision, the then Chair of the AAH was anxious to ensure that only an art historian should represent the design historical cause and pressured the proposed candidate to withdraw. Today, and for several decades since the 1970s, the AAH community has warmly embraced design history.

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INTRODUCTION

Joanna Weddell and Liz Farrelly

This book was prompted by the comment from a respondent to Bourdieu and Darbel's survey: 'Maybe there should be museums with modern stuff in them, but it wouldn't be a proper museum' (Bourdieu and Darbel 1969:48). Despite its title, *The Love of Art* features an exhibition of contemporary design held in Lille, 'The Art of the Interior in Denmark', which showed 'everyday objects such as glass and crystal, ceramics and furniture', introducing the 'atmosphere of the department store'. Bourdieu and Darbel compare the art gallery with this 'poor man's museum' stressing the contrast between the sacred and the profane: 'untouchable – touchable; noise – contemplative silence; swift and haphazard exploration – slow and orderly procession; involved appreciation of venal works – pure appreciation of "priceless" works', all of which notionally posit the museum of contemporary design as one offering a distinct experience (Bourdieu and Darbel 1969:50, 89).

This book addresses the place of contemporary design objects within museums and the wider discipline of art history, with a focus on the interpretation of design. The chapters cover the collection, study and exhibition of contemporary design, from the unique, fetishized decorative object to the mass-produced industrial commodity. Chapters give perspectives on historical developments in the post-war period and aim to expand live debates on the future place of design objects in the museum. The book raises issues around design in relation to the canon, museums and interpretation in the late twentieth and twenty-first century. Current government agendas on culture and education may stress global competition but should high-quality design objects be preserved as reified cultural products or, alternatively, should the latest gadgets be studied as examples of industrial process? Does design, in the museum context, represent a rare negotiation between art and industry, state and citizen, the official and the popular, eliding categorization as a straightforwardly commodified or aestheticized object? Or does it simply canonize an edifying notion of 'good taste'? Does contemporary design, which is often ephemeral or 'process-based', stretch and strain the collecting and display procedures of the museum? And, in a world of multiple choices, is there still a need for the museum to promote 'good design' to the public?

The debate is structured into sections on the relationship between the traditional canon of art history and design, on the position of design within and beyond museums, and on the challenges and opportunities that contemporary design presents to curatorial interpretation.

Part I: The Canon and Design in the Museum

The first section relates to the notion of the 'canon' of art history and, by implication, museological practice and issues that arise when placing design within museums, progressing through post-war concepts of 'good design' to the contemporary. The London-based chapters in Part I show a trajectory leading design from wartime restrictions through the expansion of trade and consumption, and the institutionalization of design promotion, to the emergence of new models of analysis in relation to gender and class, and on to the present.

The chapter order is broadly chronological and begins with Breakell's examination of how the archetype of the mid-century art historian, Kenneth Clark, engaged with 'good' post-war design, drawing on her extensive knowledge of the Kenneth Clark Archive at Tate. As Breakell explains, a series of exhibitions of domestic

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design organized by CEMA built on the propagandist aims of Utility design and culminated in the little-known *Design at Home* exhibition, 1945, held in the surprising venue of London's National Gallery.

The philanthropic paternalism characteristic of the Attlee government is a thread followed by Weddell who discusses the ways in which the radical ethos of the Victoria and Albert Museum (V&A) Circulation Department (Circ) under Keeper Peter Floud was demonstrated by its activities between 1947 and 1960. Circ exhibitions of contemporary design may have deliberately flouted the V&A's then canon, but they remained true to the Museum's founding purpose. The chapter elaborates Floud's complex position regarding the hand-made, the mythologizing of craft and the evolving discipline of industrial design, particularly in relation to US influences.

There were no such concerns or complications for the Council of Industrial Design (CoID). Wood uses the significant displays of the 1957 *Designs of the Year* (DOTY) at CoID's new Haymarket Design Centre to examine design in relation to class, taste and consumption. The DOTY selections were not consistently brave, modern or progressive as Wood's detailed examination of correspondence (between the institution and its judges) demonstrates, revealing the limits of British establishment taste.

Stylianou returns us to the V&A where the donation of Hayes Textiles was accommodated by the Museum canon because it met the criteria of representing British design. The Museum's founding collections define its remit even though these arrived from disparate sources and were formed by various motives. In examining the relationship of the Nigerian *gele* to the V&A collections, Stylianou highlights the complexity of transnational processes, as the UK textile company designed for its colonial market.

Of more recent foundation and with an avowedly more commercial and industrial remit is the Design Museum, London, which emerged from an earlier prototype, the Boilerhouse Project at the V&A. Sugg Ryan engages with design exhibitions that break the curatorial mould, discussing her role as curator of the Design Museum's *Ideal Home* exhibition, 1993. The limitations of even a contemporary canon are demonstrated through reactions to this museum's representation of a truly popular and commercial trade exhibition and by examining the media coverage of *Constance Spry: A millionaire for a few pence*, 2004, also at the Design Museum, London.

In contrast to younger design museums, commentators might see the V&A as the 'lumbering old mother museum' (Pearman 2014) but Scholze explains the Museum's efforts to evolve and adapt in an age not dissimilar to Prince Albert's 'period of most wonderful transition' with its 'achievements of modern invention' (Martin 1877). Scholze discusses the challenge to curatorial practice represented by digital objects that resist traditional insistence on singularity and provenance but that can nevertheless be documented. With her account of the 2013 acquisition of the 3D-printed firearm, *Liberator*, Scholze brings the canon up to date.

Part II: Positioning Design within and beyond the Museum

Part II discusses the positioning of contemporary design within and beyond the art gallery, the national museum, the commercial space, the design museum and onto broader national and international stages, in the process extending debates about design versus art by examining newly minted terminology, such as Design Art and World Art. The section expands from the new museology approach of New Labour to cover dynamic, narrative and outward-facing curatorial roles in the UK and Italy – closing with the re-visioning of design in a Scandinavian museum.

Rajguru and Ashmore recount contemporary curatorial activity around an historic collection in Brighton where designed objects are positioned as world art, perhaps as curio/us others. Their chapter pays close attention to the specifics of labels and curatorial strategies to evaluate the Hindu Shrine Project performances

and outreach exercises undertaken in Brighton in relation to displays at the Raja Dinkar Kelkar Museum, Pune, India.

Lucarelli outlines the curatorial strategies that, each year, reposition the displays at the Triennale Design Museum (TDM), Milan, using a dynamic model that rejects the static monolithic permanent collection of the design museum. The TDM approach questions museological authority – itself always subject to successive revisions – creating a structure of multiple loans from beyond the museum. This openly transient multiplicity of readings can be seen as a refutation of Marinetti's museum/cemetery paradigm (Marinetti 1909).

Narrative readings are the subject of Taylor's chapter, which examines two temporary exhibitions of contemporary furniture that inhabit the category of Design Art, one show positioned in a commercial gallery and the other in the UK's 'national museum of art and design'. Through these shows Taylor makes a subtle analysis of definitions of design and its relation to art. The category of Design Art might be contemporary but perhaps bears similarities to those virtuoso displays of modish technique that formed part of the spectacle of the nineteenth-century world's fairs.

Williams (incidentally the curator of *Telling Tales*, the subject of Taylor's chapter) discusses what he sees as modern versions of the world's fairs (including the expo) and the role of contemporary design as soft diplomacy beyond the museum. In addition to this form of state design patronage, he recognizes a further, semi-national strategy, in the liminal spaces between borders and cultures such as the airport terminal, only now with the co-option of the museum. Williams' wide-ranging examples, from 1851 to 2012, from Shanghai to Heathrow, build to an optimistic conclusion about Britain's role as an intersection for cultural design.

Pursuing a Scandinavian angle, Russell examines the recent exhibition *Risk Centre* at the Arkitekturmuseet, Stockholm, which re-appraised and re-positioned what design in the museum can achieve. Here critical design is seen to subvert passive space within the museum and re-assert the role of design as process seen through the lens of Rogoff's embodied criticality.

Part III: Interpretation and the Challenge of Design

The final Part examines the challenge presented by contemporary design to interpretation and learning in the museum, and the role of curators, exhibition designers and visitors in shaping experience and creating meaning. Contemporary design in the museum is examined as political, as postcolonial and as engaging the visitor, and by implication extending the activity and reach of the design museum.

This section begins with a personal and retrospective glance at the curatorial challenges presented by design in The Wolfsonian, Miami Beach, by objects produced under various political regimes both fascist and socialist, beyond the well-tempered middle market humanism that characterizes much twentieth-century 'good design'. Lamomaca's selection and presentation of works in the distinct context of the museum are shown to reveal the political through a didactic interpretive methodology.

Wilson's poetic and evocative images communicate the success of another form of 'retrospective', the *You Are Here: NID Traces* show, 2013, which re-interpreted the National Institute of Design collection at Ahmedabad from a global perspective. The US-led initiative of *The India Report*, 1958, authored by Charles and Ray Eames, was adopted, adapted and appropriated, with contemporary interpretation encouraging further participation from design students, teaching staff and the public.

This participative approach is also highlighted by Charman who posits a distinct difference between curating and interpreting design as opposed to contemporary art. Charman's text moves from theory to the voices of design museum curators and visitors in an innovative approach based on visitor studies conducted at the Design Museum, London.

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Visitor engagement is again a priority for design-maker-curator Cleverly who foregrounds the noise and animation of his interventions. Cleverly analyses a variety of interpretive approaches that expand the boundaries between art and science, enhanced by his experience instigating interactive museum displays. The goal is not simply to interpret but also to produce a new site-specific object.

Armstrong and Julier examine the recent Design Culture Salons at the V&A, representing a new era in social engagement for the design industry and the museum. Design Culture Salons seem to be a diversion from the production, preservation or curation of contemporary objects, however the format has much in common with that nineteenth-century manifestation of a 'salon for all', the Mechanics Institute. These provided a locus where designers and makers forged and tempered their thoughts and ideas in evening discussions away from the factory floor or draughting office; the DCS presents us with a more contemporary version, tweeted, blogged, streamed, vlogged and tubed.

Farrelly examines the evolution of interactivity beyond the gallery and onto the Internet, looking at how digital technology has shaped the online offer of the museum, through digitized archives and collections, more transparent management and new opportunities for public engagement. As the museum becomes a networked community, Farrelly examines implications for the object.

In conclusion

The museology of the art museum has been extensively discussed, published and taught while that of the design museum has received less attention. This imbalance reflects the status and position of the (at least notionally) functional objects housed by museums of design compared with fine art. Tensions around definitions of design are revealed by the range of categories available; design may be applied arts, decorative arts, material culture or those anxiety-promoting versions – industrial and commercial. Design may be hand-, batch- or mass-produced, a one-off or a branded object created by a global network of design, production, distribution and marketing. Divisions between science and art, between technology and the visual, between factory and studio, are made evident in the more ambiguous position of design and designers in contemporary commerce and culture compared with the megastars of the art world and the academic deification of scientists. And for museums tasked with the collection and display of design, this imbalance is further complicated by troublesome ambiguities; in a world where objects are fast losing their materiality the definition of design becomes more and more unstable.

What is the project to which this book contributes? Oppenheim's fur-covered cup and saucer is art while the Roberts R500 leopard-skin radio is design, Jeff Koons' double-decker vacuum cleaners provoke thought while Dyson's cyclone cleaners generate profit and political debates about the globalization of production and consumption. The identity of the design museum is related to its past, to its genesis in various trade initiatives by nineteenth-century government; unsurprising then that some of the most recent versions have obvious commercial ties. Fine art and decorative art are cultural constructs that may prove irrelevant as the museum begins to accommodate the products of the digital age, but the future mission of the design museum remains tied to its industrial past. The place and literature of the design object compared with the work of art may be distinct but is of no less interest, and as Tobias Wong's brief career proved, boundaries between the two can and should be crossed; such transgressions are not easily contained nor defined. By presenting a wide range of voices, approaches and subject matter, we hope this book will push beyond the disciplinary boundaries that might too closely define areas of interest, and instead develop wider debates around the intersection of the designed object and the museum.

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PART I

THE CANON AND DESIGN IN THE MUSEUM

CHAPTER 1

EXHIBITING 'THE TASTE OF EVERYDAY THINGS': KENNETH CLARK AND CEMA'S WARTIME EXHIBITIONS OF DESIGN

Sue Breakell

For a brief period in the second half of the Second World War, the Arts Panel of the Council for the Encouragement of Music and the Arts (CEMA), led by Sir Kenneth Clark (1903–1983), experimented with extending its remit into exhibiting design. This little-studied series of exhibitions, between 1942 and 1945, involved the Council in an emerging debate about the responsibility for state-endorsed display of design objects, and contributed to the blurring of traditional boundaries between the museum, commercial exhibitions and the particular aesthetic of the wartime propaganda display. Clark, whose engagement with design was at a peak during this period, was involved in all of these fields: he was Chair of CEMA's Arts Panel; he was Director of a national museum, albeit one with no remit for design (National Gallery, London, 1933–1945); and he was involved in discussions that led to the establishment of the Council of Industrial Design (CoID) in 1944, with a remit that included the exhibition of design.¹

The pursuit of shared wartime aims through exhibitions brought together museological, commercial and propaganda perspectives, in varying proportions and in unprecedented ways. Display was an effective means of articulating values in wartime, and Clark's Art Panel showed a tendency to seek to reconcile past and present so as to establish continuity in what was being fought for. For CEMA, with its bent towards the art world, the transformative involvement of Misha Black and Milner Gray was particularly significant, as members of both the Design Research Unit (DRU) and the Ministry of Information (MOI) exhibitions department, the influence of which has been widely discussed (Davies 2008; Cotton 2010). In his book *Exhibition Design* Black quotes an unnamed commentator as saying 'in no other field of art and architecture have the war years brought so generous and so healthy a harvest as in exhibition design' (Black 1950: 11).

CEMA was established in December 1939, with Clark one of the initial committee appointed by the Board of Education, to 'maintain the highest possible standard in our national arts of music, drama and painting at a time when these things are threatened and when too they mean more to the life of the country than they have ever meant before' (V&A EL1/2).² CEMA's work was structured around three panels: Art, with Clark its Chair; Music; and Drama. A major component of the Art Panel's work was touring exhibitions, initially through the British Institute for Adult Education's (BIAE) *Art for the People* scheme. Clark said in October 1940 that the circulating exhibition scheme 'gave real hope for the future because it was laying the foundations of a popular understanding of living art and living artists . . . it was the one channel open for getting in touch with ordinary people and creating among them a new and genuine appreciation of painting' (V&A EL1/3, 6th meeting).

His colleague Bill Williams described it as 'pioneering work in unsophisticated communities' (V&A EL1/6, Council Paper 119), suggesting the values of benevolent paternalism that underpinned this programme for the dissemination of culture. From 1942 CEMA organized its own exhibitions as well; these were intended to be 'more sophisticated' (V&A EL1/15, Council Paper 137) than the BIAE's smaller scheme, suggesting that certain communities were expected to be more receptive. CEMA also began an art collection, commissioning

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and purchasing artworks with a complementary purpose: 'to give illustrations of pleasing and competent contemporary work, which might be bought by ordinary people and lived with in ordinary homes' (V&A EL1/20).

As CEMA's programme of art exhibitions expanded in scope and geographical coverage, it was but a short step for such a mission to incorporate design. It began to include design exhibitions with a broadly similar aim of developing the public's confidence in buying, or what in a fine art context Clark called patronage: both design and patronage were growing interests of Clark's at this time.³ At the opening of an early exhibition of the CEMA art collection in 1942, he declared that the show was 'not so much an attempt at state patronage, as an encouragement to private patronage ... its very modesty is a proof that painting is not solely a thing for public galleries, any more than flowers are things for public gardens' (TGA 8812/2/2/991). Before the war, design had been a peripheral engagement for him: for example, his membership of the Post Office's Poster Advisory Group, or opening an exhibition of commercial art at Shell, reflected his status as an establishment expert and someone with 'taste'. As the war progressed, Clark became increasingly involved in design, as a practical means of employing fine art – and artists – in the projects of wartime propaganda and post-war reconstruction. Alongside his work with the War Artists' Advisory Committee and a string of other arts-related committees, design was another way to encourage aesthetic appreciation and thus a kind of artistic patronage by both industry and public: 'During the last twenty years, artists have come to look hopefully towards industry as a patron' (Clark 1944).

Clark was also an active member of the Weir Committee, appointed by the Board of Trade, generally considered as the immediate bureaucratic trigger for the formation of the Council of Industrial Design in December 1944, whose mission was 'to promote by all practicable means the improvement of design in the products of British industry' (CoID 5). Clark turned down the salaried post of Director of the CoID (TNA BT64/1573)⁴ but was a founding member and chaired the Design and Exhibitions committee, although he resigned from this role as early as May 1945, which might be considered the start of his disengagement from design.⁵ From the start, reaching both public and industry through displays and exhibitions was a priority for the CoID.⁶ Such an idea was not new: it had been regularly proposed through the 1920s and 1930s by bodies including the Design and Industries Association and the Council of Art and Industry, as well as in the Gorell report of 1932, all part of the momentum that culminated in the CoID's formation. A letter from Hugh Dalton, President of the Board of Trade, to Thomas Barlow, Chairman of the CoID, in December 1944, reproduced in the Council's first Annual Report, declares the first two functions of the Council to be 'to encourage and assist the establishment and conduct of Design Centres by industries' and 'to provide a national display of well designed goods by holding, or participating in, exhibitions and to conduct publicity for good design in other appropriate forms' (CoID). Through 1945 the National Exhibition of Industrial Design began to take shape; eventually titled *Britain Can Make It* (BCMI), it was held at the Victoria and Albert Museum (V&A) from September to December 1946.⁷

Meanwhile, under Clark's Art Panel, two strands of CEMA design exhibitions had emerged in 1943. The BIAE, with its remit of reaching 'unsophisticated communities', organized *Design in Daily Life* for CEMA: 'pottery, glass, textiles and household equipment arranged to demonstrate the importance of form and colour in modern design' (TNA ED136/188A), suggesting that it comprised new or at least broadly contemporary objects.⁸ In Clark's archive is a leaflet for *Ideas on Design in the Home*, a CEMA/BIAE Art for the People exhibition from around 1943–1944; this may be the same exhibition, but if not, it is similar in scope and intent, listing six rules to guide consumer choices: 'the creation of a delightful home is a task which calls for careful estimate of our budget and full use of our powers of discrimination ... what we should above all strive for is to create an atmosphere of peace and comfort, and to achieve that end we must choose our decorations, textiles and furniture with care' ('Ideas on Design in the Home', TGA 8812/1/1/44).

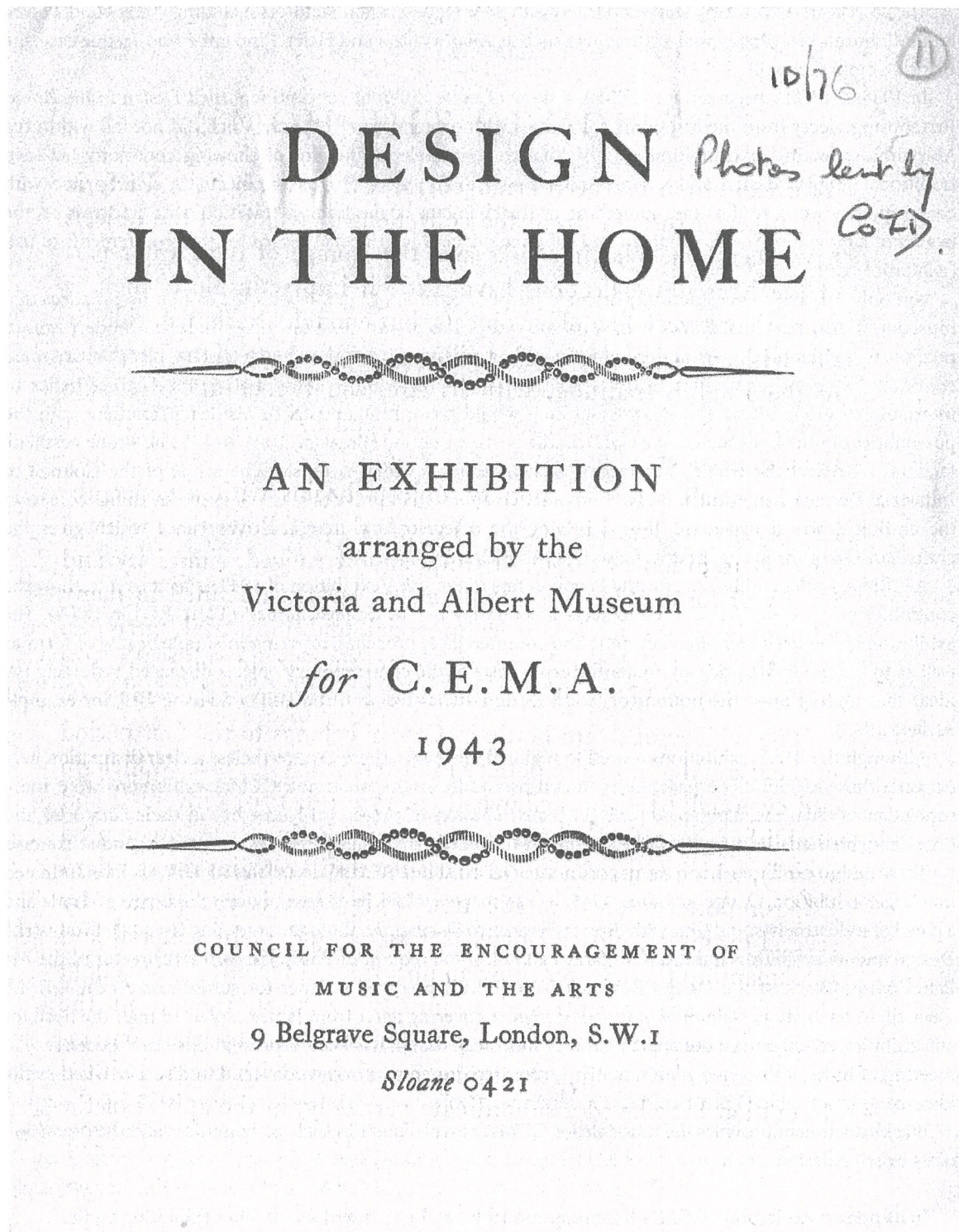


Figure 1.1 *Design in the Home*, exhibition leaflet, CEMA/V&A, 1943. Design Council Archive, University of Brighton Design Archive.

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The objects are all contemporary, and listed with their lenders: manufacturers including Wedgwood, Powell and Edinburgh Weavers, as well as designers such as Allan Walton and Helen Pincombe, and, in one case, the British Colour Council.

In 1943, the V&A prepared for CEMA a show of quite different conception, called *Design in the Home*. Juxtaposing pieces from the Museum's collections with contemporary objects, which did not fall within the Museum's collecting or exhibiting remit at that time, it declared the aim of showing continuity between traditional English design and a more modern sensibility: 'a ... few older objects ... side by side with contemporary work, to illustrate something of the character of the English tradition, with its stress on the beauty of simple forms and restrained and sober colour, and its practical regard for the requirements of use' (exhibition leaflet, DCA).

Not only was such an aesthetically oriented purpose much more in line with the exhibition practices of a museum, it also matched Clark's own position within the broad spectrum of attitudes to modernism, in relation to contemporary art and design: for him, it was important that contemporary pieces maintained continuity with the vernacular British tradition, rather than simply appropriating the characteristics of international modernism.⁹ Indeed, this question would prove fundamental to his disillusionment with the possibilities of initiatives such as the CoID, in the post-war period (Breakell 2015). In 1953 he wrote: 'aesthetic faculties ... reflect the whole character of a civilisation ... which is outside the scope of the Council of Industrial Design or any similar body. ... In practice, efforts to improve the taste of everyday things consist in the cutting down of ornament, thus depriving the object of that marginal exuberance which gives the craftsmanship of the past its charm for us' (TGA 8812/2/2/47).

A CEMA leaflet entitled 'Art for the People' refers to the V&A exhibition of 1943 as 'arranged to show the continuity of good design in a few objects of everyday use in English homes' (TNA ED136/188A). The exhibition leaflet itself combines aesthetic and commercial approaches, referring to 'simple beauty of form' as well as to the moderate price and manufacturing costs of the contemporary objects displayed, reflecting the ideas that underpinned the notions of Good Design associated with the Utility Scheme (see, for example Attfield 1999).

Although the BIAE exhibitions toured to regional museums, there is nevertheless a clear distinction here between those exhibitions organized by museums and those that were not; CEMA exhibitions were 'more sophisticated' than the BIAE's not only in their inclusion of museum objects, but in their curatorial and organizing methods, bringing the V&A's authority to what might otherwise be seen as a propagandist exercise.

These design exhibitions, and the questions they raised about CEMA's contribution to this field, culminated in a larger exhibition, *Design At Home*, 1945, whose shape evolved in discussion with the Board of Trade and a panel of industrialists, and thus with direct reference to discussions about the emerging Council of Industrial Design and its exhibiting ambitions. In January 1944, at the request of Philip James, then Director of the Art Panel, Misha Black of the Design Research Unit (DRU) prepared a Paper for submission to the CEMA Council, *Notes on an exhibition of industrial design*. A covering letter from James explained that: 'the need for an exhibition to encourage the appreciation of industrial design has been expressed in several quarters ... a meeting of industrialists and representatives from departments has been convened to discover whether the idea seems practicable' (V&A EL1/17, Council Paper 178).

Black's document provides the rationale for CEMA's involvement in such an exhibition, and the expansion of its existing design ambitions:

In its fine art exhibitions, CEMA has unquestionably set the standard for all other exhibiting bodies. ... In the fine arts, music and drama the Council has brilliantly interpreted encouragement of the arts to mean national leadership.



Figure 1.2 Exhibition catalogue for *Design at Home: an exhibition of furniture and furnishings*, Arts Council of Great Britain/CEMA, National Gallery, 1945. Front cover. Design Council Archive, University of Brighton Design Archive.

This, however, is not the case as far as industrial design is concerned. The CEMA industrial design exhibitions have been small in size, few in number and unimpressive in technique. . . . While a new small CEMA exhibition on industrial design would be of some minor value, the time seems to have been reached when CEMA could reasonably assume, in industrial design, that position of national leadership which it enjoys in relation to other visual arts.

The design of post-war industrial projects will be a major factor in determining our environment and in the re-establishment of Britain's export trade. While the latter problem may not be the direct concern of CEMA, the former seems clearly to come within its province (V&A EL1/17, Council Paper 178).

By claiming 'determining our environment' as the concern of CEMA, Black chimes with Clark's approach to design. He refers explicitly to the proposals of the Weir Committee, of which Clark was a member, and to the display remit of what became the CoID: 'it would be a preliminary experimental prototype of the permanent British Design Pavilion which I understand is recommended by the Weir Committee'. In asserting for CEMA a position of 'national leadership', Black makes an extraordinarily bold attempt on the territory already intended for the Council of Industrial Design.

The number of people in this country able to effectively organise and design an industrial design exhibition is limited; the problems of materials and exhibition premises are acute . . . instead of organising

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a new small CEMA exhibition the Council should ... sponsor the production of one major exhibition, sufficiently impressive in size, scope and method of presentation to set a standard for all future shows of this character.

CEMA is the only body with sufficient integrity, prestige and authority to undertake this task. If CEMA is unwilling to do so, we must expect a whole series of exhibitions on industrial design each boosting one particular industry or other, and none with sufficient authority to be accepted by the public and manufacturers as providing that leadership so urgently needed if British industrial design is to be rescued from that pathetic sordidity which is now its characteristic feature (V&A EL1/17, Council Paper 178).

The main Council was supportive of the principle of a larger scale design exhibition: 'An exhibition of Design on a far more important scale than either of the Design Exhibitions so far circulated seemed appropriate at the present moment' (TNA ED136/188A, 5th meeting, 18 Jan 1944). The Board of Trade, to whom the proposal was passed before the meeting of the Arts Panel at which this was discussed, were 'uncompromisingly opposed to holding an exhibition which could not contain objects which were for purchase by the public' (TNA ED136/188A, 5th meeting, 18 Jan 1944); Clark himself later expressed a similar widely held concern about BCMI, writing to the CoID's Director, S. C. Leslie, in August 1945: 'All I feel is that the exhibition should not be too large because there will simply not be the stuff to show, and it is better to tell the President so now than to find ourselves letting in second rate things of which we shall all be secretly ashamed when the time comes' (DCA/14A/312); rationing of domestic items such as furniture continued until 1952. The Board of Trade, and Clark, would also have been conscious that such an exhibition might conflict with, or steal the thunder of, the future CoID. Black's proposal was rejected: his 'suggestion for an exhibition on the really grand scale was impracticable, at any rate at present' (TNA ED 136/188A, 6th meeting, 29 Feb 1944). Nevertheless, CEMA still wanted to be involved in a design exhibition: 'CEMA offers its service to secure an impartial selection of material, and to ensure that it shall be an exhibition of taste as well as trade.' It may be that this was Clark's intention all along: for CEMA to contribute a similar element of 'taste' to the emergent state-endorsed design exhibitions, to that which he might be seen to bring to the Council of Industrial Design through his involvement: as demonstrated by the fact that even after his resignation from the chair of the Design and Exhibitions Committee, Clark accepted an invitation to review the furnished rooms component of *Britain Can Make It* (TGA 8812/1/4/126), even though he had resigned from chairing the Design and Exhibitions Committee in late May 1945, a few weeks after *Design at Home* opened.

A second report was commissioned, this time from Black's DRU colleague Milner Gray, and discussed by the Panel in July 1944 (TNA ED136/188A). Even this more modest version required a budget of £3,000, much larger than any other CEMA exhibition to date, but nevertheless approved. Rather than Black's ambitious scheme to bring together industry, the professions and the public, Gray set out a similar purpose to the V&A's *Design in the Home* exhibition of the previous year, and indeed to BCMI:

The principle [sic] aim of this exhibition is understood to be to explain to the general public the nature and function of what has come to be called Industrial Design and to foster public interest in and appreciation of good design in things of everyday use ... the object here would be to emphasise that good design need cost no more than bad (Gray TNA ED136/188A).

The catalogue for *Design at Home*, which opened on 1 May 1945 at the National Gallery, shows that it was significantly scaled down from Gray's original proposals. It declares a more modest intention than either Black or Gray envisaged: one more in keeping with CEMA's remit:

With the close of the European war, it is felt that an exhibition relating to the problem of home furnishing and decoration in the immediate post-war period would not be inappropriate ... Anything that will encourage a display of individual taste and an interest in the pleasant task of home making, beset by difficulties though it may be, is to be desired. We have received the most friendly advice throughout from the Board of Trade, and it is most satisfactory to be able to record that the new Council of Industrial Design came into being during the period of the exhibition's production, a welcome token of the government's determination to encourage the use of good design in industry (DCA, *Design at Home*, 1).

Thus the CEMA catalogue cedes authority to the CoID while asserting its own territory, taste: it then withdraws from the field. Gray's proposal indicates an attempt to reconcile what had previously been more distinct modes of display: commercial, entertainment and educative modes brought together to serve propaganda purposes. Talking of entrance fees, he attempts to locate the exhibition on such a spectrum.

In this war it has been accepted that exhibitions which are purely instructional, or propagandist and in the national interest cannot justify an admission charge; but an exhibition on Industrial Design of the type envisaged, whilst educational in aim, has a definite entertainment value and therefore could be very justifiably exempt from the above strictures (Gray TNA ED136/188A).

Playing these tensions out in practical as well as conceptual terms, Gray touches on the balance between object, staging and interpretation:

collected opinion tends to show that public interest in the purely photo-documentary show is beginning to pall. The display should comprise a large proportion of manufactured articles ... but it is equally important that these articles should be shown not as a mere museum collection but as part of a larger story running through the exhibition.

Clearly, to Gray, a conventional museum display alone will not convey a strong enough message: a letter from panel member Philip Hendy to Gray in August 1944 represents one possible museum perspective, and supports Gray's view: 'all texts are detestable in exhibitions: likewise all photos, diagrams, captions etc. etc. It seems to me the catalogue is the proper place for all such propaganda and explanations, as well as for the names of designers and manufacturers (V&A EL2/1).¹⁰

There is a good deal of this kind of information in the catalogue. Noel Carrington's introduction declared: 'The whole object of this exhibition is to prove ... the ability to triumph over the deadening effects of standardization by the exercise of personal judgment and taste' (DCA, *Design at Home*, 2). *Design at Home* took a more overtly educational line than the previous exhibitions, aiming to evoke a concrete response from the visitor. The catalogue speaks of a 'design problem for each room', teaching the viewer how to solve domestic design problems by the exercise of personal choice, or taste.

The National Gallery was not the obvious venue for a design exhibition, but in the absence of its collection (stored in Welsh mines to avoid bombing), the Gallery under Clark's direction had been used for purposes unimaginable before the war, thus attracting new audiences. Through exhibitions, concerts and picnics on the lawn outside, the wartime Gallery became a space where notions of British culture and character could be articulated. As such, it had particular associations as a venue for this exhibition. Seeking approval for the exhibition, Clark reassured the National Gallery trustees that it would be held in 'rooms unsuitable for the exhibition of paintings': the primacy of paintings was not in question (NG1/12, 3 October 1944).

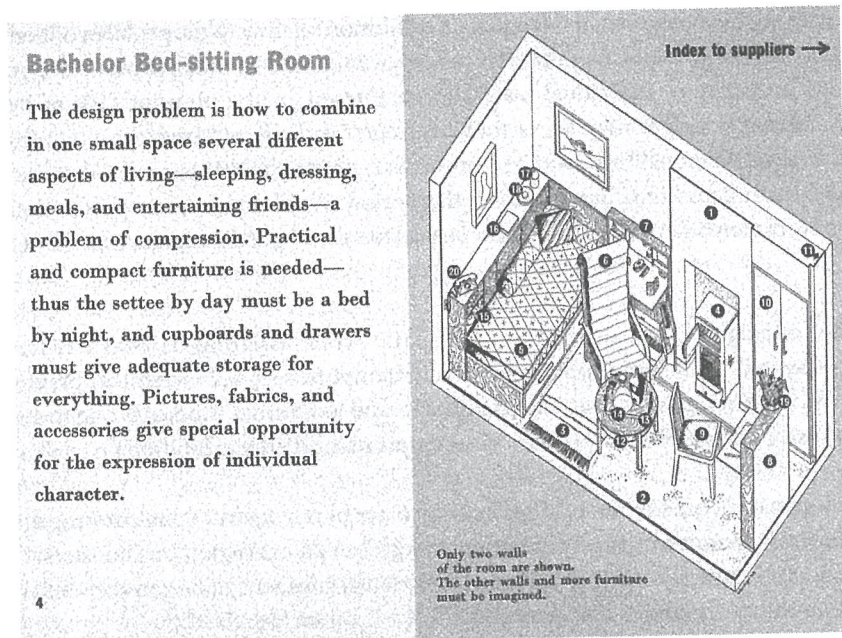


Figure 1.3 'Bachelor bed-sitting room', from the exhibition catalogue for *Design at Home: an exhibition of furniture and furnishings*, Arts Council of Great Britain/CEMA, National Gallery, 1945. Design Council Archive, University of Brighton Design Archive.

This blurring of the traditional boundaries of the museum also erupted in other ways. The V&A's new Director, Leigh Ashton, was concerned about the involvement of both CEMA and the CoID in the display of contemporary objects, which was a function of the Museum's long-established Department of Circulation. As early as November 1944 the V&A threatened to cut off its exhibition preparation services to CEMA (TNA ED 136/188B); in Spring 1945, perhaps provoked by the opening of *Design at Home*, Ashton made what Arts Council Chairman Maynard Keynes described in a letter to Mary Glasgow as 'amount[ing] to a proposal that the V&A should take over the whole business of selecting and distributing exhibitions, instead of CEMA' (V&A EL2/1, 15 June 1945). Later, Ashton wrote to CEMA Secretary Glasgow that the touring of exhibitions of objects was 'not a proper duty of the Council except on special occasions' (V&A EL2/1, 15, 25 July 1945). Clearly on the defensive, Ashton proposed that the V&A, the CoID and CEMA should share a central depot for the storage, packing and transportation of objects, as part of the Museum's plans for re-opening its Circulation service after the war, thus giving the Museum the pivotal role as holder of this expertise.¹¹ A CoID document from around this same time entitled 'A Policy and Programme for Exhibition' notes, under the subheading 'the need for co-ordination', stated:

The V&A ... has many facilities for the assembling, purchase, circulation and display of objects. A valuable working partnership can be organized between the Council and the V&A which has offered unstinted help. The Council might well adapt a general rule of using the V&A resources and facilities to the fullest extent wherever possible (DCA/14/14[E1]).

Indeed, as Doreen Leach has noted, Ashton also criticized the CoID's plans in terms of both collecting and display of objects (Maguire and Woodham 1997: 224). Initially he lamented the fact that the Museum was not

represented on the Council, while Clark, Director of another national museum whose remit had nothing to do with design, was a member, albeit in a personal capacity. In May 1945, as *Design at Home* opened, and at around the same time as his exchanges with CEMA, Ashton was dismayed to discover that the CoID planned to purchase objects, apparently in direct competition with the Museum's Circulation Department. Ashton saw Clark as being responsible for the CoID's plan, presumably because Clark had initiated CEMA's picture-buying activities. Ashton believed he saw 'a dictatorship on modern design controlled by Sir Kenneth Clark and two Government Departments competing with each other' (Maguire and Woodham 1997: 225). In fact by late summer there might have appeared to be the threat of *three* competing state-funded bodies, the V&A, CEMA and the CoID, two of which were heavily influenced by Clark, who had also brought another national museum, the National Gallery, into the fray. However, with the opening of *Design at Home*, not only CEMA but also Clark, with his resignation from the CoID's Design and Exhibitions Committee, began to withdraw from the field. At the first meeting of that Committee, in February 1945, Clark had explained that the large-scale CEMA design exhibition 'had been planned before the Council had come into being; but on behalf of CEMA he agreed with the suggestion that mention might be made of the Council' (DCA/42/289); we have seen that the catalogue did just that. But crucially, the CoID document that recorded the V&A's offers of help also noted that 'CEMA (The Arts Council) has organized large and small exhibitions of design, but an informal understanding has now been reached with them by which they will leave industrial art and design entirely to the Council' (DCA/14/14[E1]).

A struggle for territory had been played out over the location of design exhibitions, with skirmishes between a variety of interested parties. Who in these circumstances was qualified to pass judgement on the contemporary design object? What was its status and function in these different kinds of display and venue? Could designer, manufacturer, curator and bureaucrat resolve these issues between them? Clearly committed to the importance of an exhibition of design, which fitted with his ideas about the visual arts in wartime and post-war society, Clark was happy simultaneously to be involved in multiple and potentially competing elements, employing his skills of cultural brokerage to navigate a course, at times both proactive and reactive, though not without provoking responses such as Ashton's. CEMA's exhibitions, organized largely for what Black would call propaganda purposes, with an overarching wartime purpose of consumer education, nevertheless also came under CEMA's brief of arts appreciation. In planning a larger scale exhibition 'of taste as well as trade', CEMA collided with the CoID's emerging agenda. Meanwhile, although the location of displays of design in museums gave aesthetic credibility, museums would generally consider themselves above commercial considerations, and, at this time, beyond presiding over contemporary design. The siting of BCMI at the V&A in 1946, over other possible locations such as Earls Court (Maguire and Woodham 1997: 50), is part of this same debate about exhibiting design in the museum. The location of this small series of CEMA exhibitions within a broader aesthetic agenda begins to establish a more comprehensive set of questions than have generally been considered in relation to BCMI, when discussed as primarily a commercial or industry project. This episode contributes a richer context to those emerging post-war debates about exhibiting design in the museum.

Notes

1. The archive of the Council of Industrial Design (later the Design Council) is held at the University of Brighton Design Archives.
2. For a history of the Council for the Encouragement of Music and the Arts, see White (1975), Hutchinson (1982) and Witts (1998).

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3. Clark spoke and wrote frequently about patronage at this time: for example a discussion with Eric Newton on the BBC Radio programme 'The Artist and The Patron', in the series 'The Artist in the Witness Box'.
4. Thomas Barlow personally spoke to Clark to offer him the position.
5. The period of Clark's closer involvement and disillusionment with design is considered in more detail in Breakell (2015).
6. See, for example, Whitworth (2004).
7. Records relating to BCMI can be found in the Design Council Archive, University of Brighton Design Archives. Published analyses include: Maguire, P. J. and Woodham, J. M. *Design and Cultural Politics in Postwar Britain: the Britain Can Make It exhibition of 1946*. London: Leicester University Press, 1997.
8. The exhibition toured to Salford Museum and Art Gallery, Nottingham College of Arts & Crafts, and the Geffrye Museum in East London, indicative of BIAE's target audience.
9. For example, Clark's address to the Council for Visual Education, 6 May 1947: 'the design produced in a country . . . is a reflection of certain conditions of climate, landscape, atmosphere and race' *RIBA Journal*, July 1947, 474–475.
10. Hendy was then Director of Leeds Museums (1934–1946), later taking on Clark's role as Director of the National Gallery (1946–1967).
11. The Circulation Department did not re-open until January 1947. Joanna Weddell's research investigates the V&A's work in displaying and collecting contemporary design in the post-war period. See Chapter 2.

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CHAPTER 2

THE ETHOS OF THE VICTORIA AND ALBERT MUSEUM CIRCULATION DEPARTMENT 1947–1960

Joanna Weddell

Until government cuts in 1977, the Victoria and Albert Museum (V&A) had an historic commitment to regional design education, successfully fulfilled by its Circulation Department, which sent small and large touring exhibitions to museums and art schools around the UK (Weddell 2012). The Circulation Department grew from the collections of art and design formed at the Central School of Design from 1837, founded with the aim of reforming industrial design to compete with foreign markets. These collections circulated around the UK to Government Schools of Design and were incorporated into the South Kensington Museum, later the V&A – Floud cites 1848 as the start of Circulation, its origins therefore pre-date the Museum (Floud 1949:7). In 1849 Henry Cole gave evidence to the Select Committee on the Schools of Design saying: ‘I do not think that these schools were created for aesthetic purposes, or for general educational purposes. I apprehend that the age is so essentially commercial, that it hardly looks to promoting anything of this kind except for commercial purposes’ (Sheppard 1975:74–96). In a choice between Art and Industry, it would seem that Industry won and, as others have observed, the Museum was ‘redolent of the modernity of international exhibitions, the department store, liberal economics, technical design education and utilitarian reform ideology [as well as] the more traditional curatorial and aesthetic motivations’ (Barringer 2006:133–145).

This chapter discusses the Circulation Department of the Victoria and Albert Museum in the period 1947 to 1960, under Keeper Peter Floud CBE (1911–1960), when Circulation (familiarily known as ‘Circ’) was the largest department of the V&A. The Department’s ethos has been articulated as left-wing in outlook and organization, with many staff being members of the Communist Party of Great Britain (until the Hungarian uprising of 1956), and concerned to address the ‘working class’ as well as the elite scholarly connoisseur (Sandino 2013). Circ was egalitarian, for example promoting female staff members and having a less militaristic or paternalistic hierarchy than was usual in the Museum, and elsewhere in society, at that time (Adams 2010:28–42). The Department was concerned with social equality and access for all, for example through a system where all museums paid the same transport charge regardless of distance from South Kensington, and by ensuring that touring shows had free admission and full labels, to obviate the need for an expensive catalogue purchase. Innovative in its approach to scholarship, for example through the use of patent books to firmly date designs, Circ focused on Victorian and Edwardian design, unusually for the Museum at this date when acquisitions were largely pre-1830 (Burton 1981:54). Circ was engaged with the contemporary, being the only V&A department to seriously pursue the acquisition and display of new design objects during this period.

I discuss some of the ways in which Circ’s exhibitions reflected this established ethos and go on to examine in detail the Department’s attitude to contemporary design and commerce. As evidence I use Floud’s published and unpublished writing, the Department’s travelling exhibitions and data from Circ’s acquisitions during this period. There seem to have been tensions and oppositions between Art and Industry, with ‘industrial design’ a particularly contested term.

The Circulation Department 1947–1960

Peter Castle Floud was the dynamic and visionary Keeper of the Circulation Department between 1947 and 1960, developing a strong ethos of public service in the exhibitions programme and innovations in both display and acquisitions. Floud came from an establishment background, attending Gresham's in Norfolk and taking a First in PPE at Wadham College, Oxford.¹ Unsurprisingly, given his degree, Floud was politicized at Oxford and, in common with many of his generation, saw the Communist Party of Great Britain as a constructive alternative to Europe's growing Fascism, being a member until 1956. In 1935 Floud joined the V&A as Assistant Keeper in Circ; after secondment from the Museum on war service, Floud returned to Circ in January 1947, but in charge as Keeper.

Circ was a part of a broader post-war initiative by the Attlee government to promote 'good design' across the UK.² At this date Museum staff were civil servants responsible to the Department of Education and Science and can be regarded as an arm of the state; for example, until 1983 all staff signed the Official Secrets Act. Touring art exhibitions were on the agenda for many European countries engaged in post-war reconstruction and Floud contributed to a special UNESCO publication on circulating exhibitions (Floud 1950). For Floud 'Britain not only led the world's industrial revolution: she has a unique record of selective exhibitions of industrial designs' and such regular exhibition programmes should be 'regarded by enlightened opinion as an essential part of progressive government' (Floud 1953a:24–25).

The Department's offices and stores were housed in the Museum's North Court and referred to as 'an alternative museum, a museum broken up into small, coherent units, and constantly on the road' (Vaizey 1972), perhaps a version of André Malraux's *Musée Imaginaire* with cases literally sent out beyond the museum walls (Malraux 1947). Circ occupied a position outside the main museum hierarchy, with staff having a left-wing bias and many being art school graduates rather than Oxford or Cambridge graduates, with the exception of Circ's senior staff (Floud, Wakefield and Hogben). As one long-serving member of the Department, Barbara Morris, explained, Floud treated everyone as equals and emphasized 'that we were there to help and educate the public' rather than 'pursuing curatorial interests for the sake of it' (Sandino 2009). Unlike the main Museum departments, which, since re-organization in 1909, had fostered a connoisseur approach specializing in particular materials, Circ's shows were an eclectic mix that not only physically broke away from the notion of an elitist, self-contained museum but also cut across the V&A's established organizational structure.

Floud pursued the aim of 'progressive government' through travelling exhibitions of both traditional art and commercially produced objects, sent out to the regions from the metropolitan centre of Albertopolis. The first time that a full listing of V&A travelling exhibitions appeared in *Museums Journal* in August 1949 (Vol. 49 No. 5), gives an indication of the geographic spread and range of Circulation exhibitions in the early stages of its operation under Floud. At this date the most northerly venue was Berwick-upon-Tweed, which received the *History of Lithography*; the most southerly was Hove, which saw *Early English Watercolours*; the most westerly was Carmarthen, which viewed *Decorative Woven Textiles*; and the most easterly was Norwich, which displayed a show of *English Chairs*. These towns and cities were hosting displays of the historical and the contemporary, the decorative and the commercial, a range of both Art and Industry for the education of the citizen.

Circ travelling exhibitions were 'specially prepared for the typical small general museum which needs non-specialist exhibitions, appealing to a completely uninformed public'. Such exhibitions were 'supplied with much fuller and more didactic labels than would normally accompany a Victoria and Albert exhibition' (Floud 1950:299). Arguably such explicit aims could be seen as patronizing to provincial galleries but, given an understanding of the aims of the department, this approach may be seen as pragmatic in promoting access for all, and perhaps stands as a comment on the predominant approach at South Kensington.

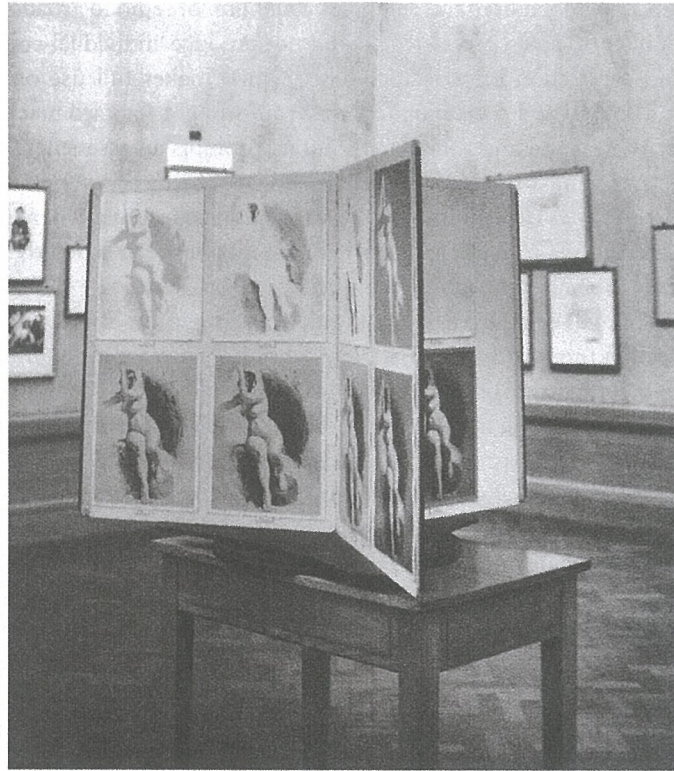


Figure 2.1 *History of Lithography* at Bolton Art Gallery, September 1950; V&A Archive MA/19/4 Photographs of exhibitions from 1956–63 in England and Scotland. Joanna Weddell © courtesy of Victoria and Albert Museum, London.

Typical of Circ's methodology was one of the early exhibitions curated under Floud, '150 Years of Lithography', 1948. Circ commissioned a poster to promote the show at regional museums from Charles Mozley and this became an exhibit in its own right, demonstrating the auto-lithograph process using successive printings (C.17459.C).³ The show included fifty frames and three technical exhibits, including an innovative collapsible revolving display case. The show was a combination of scholarly, historical objects, which Circ emphasized were 'rare early prints', illustrations of the techniques of production and up-to-date examples of contemporary printing from both home and abroad. Here we see the Department promoting a scholarly approach to art objects, improving industry and shaping the citizen's 'good taste', by negotiating between art and industry, society and the market and disseminating design to the regions. In practice then, the ethos of Circ was based on three principal elements: on scholarship, for unique, securely provenanced, aesthetic objects; on material and process, supporting students, industry, export and commerce; and on contemporary design, shaping the 'good taste' of the ideal citizen as an arm of progressive government.

Floud and contemporary design objects

Floud was a pioneering scholar and curator as seen in *Victorian and Edwardian Decorative Art*, the major exhibition held at South Kensington in 1952 (which also toured), and his view of designers such as William

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Morris was clear-eyed. In 1954 Floud used the democratic medium of radio to broadcast his conclusions that, contrary to Arts and Crafts principles, Morris & Co. did not produce 'individual craftwork, but rather what one can call serial hand-production on a factory basis, which makes full use of the division of labour and differs very little in its moral and social implications from straight-forward machine-production' (Floud 1954a,b). Floud's concern for 'moral and social implications' prompts an assessment of Circ's acquisition of both unique craft objects and mass-produced industrial designs. Circ's acceptance of the commercial may have more in common with Cole's earlier aims for the circulating collections, where opposition between the commercial and aesthetic had yet to harden, and where conflict between scholarly endeavour and wicked industry had yet to skewer the Museum.

Under Floud's leadership we see a Departmental understanding of the 'moral and social implications' of different kinds of production (craft and industrial), backed by a Keeper with a commitment to social justice (despite, or at this date one might say because of, his background) working within a state milieu favouring the promotion of good modern design across the nation. Unlike other Museum departments, which had an unofficial 'fifty year rule' against purchasing recent objects, Circ had continued the founding mission to collect contemporary design as an educational resource for manufacturers, designers and the public. At the start of the post-war period Floud could already write that 'the Circulation Department's contemporary collections are now much more extensive than those of the main Museum' (Floud post-1949:3). By 1955, at about the middle of Floud's tenure as Keeper, nearly 75 per cent of Circ's acquisitions were of contemporary or modern objects produced in the previous ten years.

Nuancing this apparent embrace of the contemporary, Floud argued a distinction between the decorative aesthetic object and industrial commercial design. In 1957 the Council of Industrial Design (CoID, later the Design Council) proposed that the winners of their contemporary design awards were to be acquired by the V&A. Floud stated that 'we never have been and are not now a museum of industrial design ... [the Museum] has always in fact been a museum of the decorative arts and never acquired objects which could be regarded as the nineteenth century precursors of the twentieth-century concept of industrial design' (Benton 1997:309–328).

Floud expressed reservations about the type of objects that would be appropriate and planned to 'limit our acceptance to objects which could be regarded as forming part of the normal equipment of a living room', rejecting the idea of displaying 'washing machines in the same building as, for example Renaissance sculpture' (Crowther 2012:11–13). Here Floud is defining acceptable design objects by their use not by their method of production; he continued 'we should certainly not normally have acquired ... pyrex ovenware or ... melmex tableware ... the majority of articles in Design [Magazine] now involve a range of expertise quite outside the orbit even of those of us here who cover the contemporary decorative arts' (Benton 1997:309–328).

In contrast to this apparent rejection of utilitarian industrial design as part of the Museum's canon, Circ had in fact acquired a Pyrex ovenware casserole in 1949, by the simple expedient of walking across the road to Harrods and spending five shillings and sixpence (Circ.160&A-1949).⁴ Earlier, in 1948, Circ had also toured 'A small exhibition showing examples of good modern design in pottery, glass and textiles', in effect, mass-produced objects for the domestic interior that had much in common with the Museum of Modern Art's series of *Useful Objects* exhibitions that toured the US and featured Pyrex from 1942 (Staniszewski 1999).⁵ In spite of Floud's reaction when faced with the CoID winners in 1957, in a 1949 article published in an American magazine, while avoiding the term 'industrial design', Floud had acknowledged that 'the loan collections of the Victoria and Albert Museum include large collections of contemporary decorative and industrial art' (Floud 1949:7).

Circ's post-war shows exhibited some British objects that were produced solely for export, as rationing precluded their sale in the UK, for example, *Tablewares of Today*, 1952, which would be 'new to the public since most of the best British wares are for "export only" and most of the foreign wares cannot normally be



Figure 2.2 *Contemporary Scandinavian Furnishing Fabrics* at Manchester Regional College of Art, September 1956; V&A Archive MA/19/4 Photographs of exhibitions from 1956–63 in England and Scotland. Joanna Weddell © courtesy of Victoria and Albert Museum, London.

imported into this country.’⁶ These travelling shows toured to museums, galleries and public libraries to influence and educate the consumer, promoting British products and consumption. In 1956 the Department exhibited the first of a series of contemporary exhibitions described as ‘industrial wares, which have been recently designed in a modern spirit’, shown at South Kensington but demoted to the Restaurant not the main galleries, and for later regional circulation. As with MoMA’s precedent, these were on open display units rather than in locked cases, closer to a department store display than a museum environment (Wakefield 1957:243–244). The series later included national surveys of fabrics and wallpaper, bringing international design to art and design students and citizens across the UK as rationing and import restrictions were lifted. These contemporary touring collection displays may be seen to act as a distanced but authoritative locus for a meeting between commercial industry and decorative design, allowing them to avoid categorization as a straightforward agent of commodification or aestheticization (Wood 1996).

Floud and his team undertook extensive research into Victorian and Edwardian design, a field at that time ignored by other V&A departments (Burton 1981:54), establishing a reputation for innovative and thorough scholarship brought to fruition in the 1952 *Exhibition of Victorian and Edwardian Decorative Arts*. Over 24,000 people attended the exhibition at South Kensington, which then travelled around the UK in various forms, for example *Victorian Pottery*, 1954. The original scheme was to cover the period from 1851 to 1951 and Floud proposed that: ‘The Exhibition would not, of course, be limited to hand-made objects, but would also include machine-made textiles, commercially-produced ceramics, etc. These latter would,

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however, only be included if they were the work of known designers.⁷ To establish secure provenance Floud used contemporary press reports and doggedly followed up the descendants of those who had bought or commissioned work from significant design pioneers, successfully persuading many to loan or gift objects to the Museum. In an internal memorandum Floud describes other scholarly efforts in the field including Pevsner's as 'very superficial', explicitly rejecting a 'modish display of bric-a-brac' and contrasting Circ's 'scientific and objective approach to the period' with the 'fashionable dilettantism' of others such as Grigson and Betjeman.⁸

Floud's original scheme further illuminates his attitude to contemporary commercial design. He hoped that:

The Final section of the Exhibition [up to 1951] would include a certain number of articles usually regarded as examples of 'Industrial Design', but only in so far as these fall within the field normally covered by this Museum. (e.g. it would include one of Ambrose Heal's early tubular-steel chairs, and Well [sic] Coates' early wireless-cabinet, because these are both examples of furniture, but kitchen-equipment, electric-irons, etc., would be excluded).⁹

There would be no attempt to include 'the routine everyday productions of the period' but rather objects that were 'in advance of popular taste' and of 'some solid merit as the work of serious designers'.¹⁰ In this context industrial design is acceptable to the Museum canon, when defined by its use and design source rather than by method of production. Here the Circ ethos seems open to mass-produced design objects, as long as they are by a significant pioneering designer and not for the kitchen.

Floud and craft

It can be seen that there is some evidence of Circ maintaining the tradition of Cole's 'commercial purposes' in its circulation of technical exhibits, and pursuing 'educational and aesthetic purposes' through both historic scholarship and the acquisition of contemporary design objects. In the catalogue to the *Exhibition of Victorian and Edwardian Decorative Arts* Floud noted Morris's 'crusade against the debased standards of mid-Victorian mass-production', which Morris attributed to 'the influence of machine-manufacture and the disappearance of... hand-craftsmanship'. Further Morris's doctrine was that 'true design must be based on an understanding of technical processes' (Floud 1952:38, 115). However, Floud was clearly concerned about the state of contemporary industrial design and, on the occasion of the anniversary of *The Studio*, took the opportunity of comparing Arts and Crafts doctrine in 1893 and 1953. Floud explicitly separated design from production, with no bias towards the handmade over the machine, or towards art rather than industry, writing:

the main pivot of current Arts and Crafts doctrine, and indeed the main criterion normally employed today in defining craft-work – namely the identity of designer and craftsman – received little attention in 1893. The founders of the Society... never executed their own designs, but invariably turned them over to commercial firms... or to professional craftsmen or women... present-day Arts and Crafts doctrine, by emphasizing individualistic and subjective criteria, and especially by insisting on the identity of designer and executants, defines the crafts much more narrowly than did the accepted theory of 1893. It would be valuable if the movement took the opportunity... to consider the extent, if any, to which the present difficult – and indeed discouraging – position of so many of the crafts is connected with this change (Floud 1953b:126–135).