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*La conception d'expositions comme moyen de commercialisation du modernisme architectural dans la Grande-Bretagne de l'entre-deux-guerres*

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**Electronic version**

URL: <https://journals.openedition.org/lha/11077>

DOI: 10.4000/123q5

ISSN: 1960-5994

**Publisher**

Association Livraisons d'histoire de l'architecture - LHA

**Electronic reference**

Vanessa Vanden Berghe, "Locating Exhibition Design as a Means of Marketing Architectural Modernism in Inter-War Britain", *Livraisons de l'histoire de l'architecture* [Online], 46 | 2024, Online since 26 July 2024, connection on 28 July 2024. URL: <http://journals.openedition.org/lha/11077> ; DOI: <https://doi.org/10.4000/123q5>

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# Locating Exhibition Design as a Means of Marketing Architectural Modernism in Inter-War Britain

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“Man’s rapid progress is based on words, we think in words, our minds string words like beads... Pictures, visions, memories of things seen are neglected. Children see the visions more than grown-ups. We teach them the craft of word-spinning. The damage is done, we should be teaching them the art of seeing.”<sup>1</sup>

Frank Pick, 1922

- 1 Throughout the interwar period in Britain an array of Modernist visual languages was developed, and all of them are important to our understanding of how people approached and negotiated modernity, often mediated by the technologies of photography and film, and design. Of particular relevance to this account is the discourse that emphasized seeing, or in other words, the visual. The negotiation of modernity through the visual and people’s own senses of being “modern” was to become one of the key features characterizing the design output of architects in the years of the economic depression in the early 1930s—such as Oliver Hill’s (1887-1968), who had a successful career during the interwar period in Britain designing mostly domestic settings for the upper and upper middle classes.
- 2 Exhibitions and the “arts of display,” as coined by the civil servant and former editor of *Country Life*, Sir Lawrence Weaver (1876-1930), were seen as a key medium of communication that could be experimented with.<sup>2</sup> Many innovative exhibition designs were first seen by the public during the twenties and the thirties. Designers like Frederick Kiesler, Herbert Bayer and László Moholy-Nagy devised new forms of display which, as Mary Anne Staniszewski has pointed out “revolutionized the rigid constraints of traditional exhibition conventions.”<sup>3</sup> Indeed, not only did exhibitions act as a shop front for the latest architectural design and thinking, they also helped the organizers to

influence their visitors and wider public opinion. One such exhibition, “The Exhibition of British Industrial Art in Relation to the Home,” organized by Oliver Hill and held at the Dorland Hall London in 1933 (Ill.1) will be used to explore how designers such as Hill sought to educate the public in matters of design.

Ill. 1: Poster, “Exhibition of British Industrial Art in Relation to the Home,” Dorland Hall, Regent Street, London, Austin Cooper, 1933.



© RIBA, London, ref. HiO 28/3 Dorland Hall – Lower Regent Street London W1, 1932-33.

## Educating the Public

- 3 In the first decades of the twentieth century Britain saw a steady stream of protests against what was described as the horrors of popular and industrial art. “Public taste,” as one letter to the Editor of *The Times* noted, was “simply the lowest common factor of ourselves” and it was time to dispense with the doctrine of “what the public wants” so that the levels of popular and industrial art could be raised.<sup>4</sup> Whilst opinions such as these were nothing new, the call for the involvement of publicity and marketing in elevating public opinion was. Publicists and civil servants, such as Sir Charles Highman and Sir Lawrence Weaver, saw it as the government’s role to mold public opinion as it had formed a “mysterious tyrannical obstruction” to progress. The idea of “good” British design was, therefore, becoming less abstract during the interwar period, and the focus was now being directed more to the public than to the manufacturers.<sup>5</sup>
- 4 Elevating public taste had always been a daunting task. As early as 1835, the government established the *Select Committee on Arts and Manufacturers* in order:
 

“[...] to inquire into the best means of extending a knowledge of the Arts and the Principle of Design among the People (especially the manufacturing Population) of

the Country; also to inquire into the constitution management and effects of Institutions connected with the Arts.”<sup>6</sup>

- 5 An important aspect that was insisted on by this Committee was that “national taste” was to be achieved through the closer involvement with the national schools of design, museums and exhibitions. Equally important was that this committee, as outlined by art historian Mervyn Romans, linked taste with consumerism, morality and manufacturing as “[t]aste was an all-embracing term that took in moral imperatives, civic behavior, good judgment in consumer choices, and the promotion of economic interests.”<sup>7</sup>

These conclusions certainly found sympathy with the government and among privately organized bodies that were set up in the early twentieth century to pursue such policies. One such example of a governmental organization was the *British Institute of Industrial Arts* (BIIA), established in 1919, which grew out of the perceived need to “draw attention of the public to the contemporary craft works.”<sup>8</sup> This, according to Sir Hubert Llewellyn Smith, the Permanent Secretary at the Board of Trade, “should take the shape of (1) A permanent Central Exhibition of current works produced by living craftsmen, for sale, subject to the enforcement of a high standard of merit by the Selecting Committee; (2) Attached to the Exhibition a Sale Agency [...]”<sup>9</sup> This approach shows how the BIIA immediately sought to influence the purchasers of British products. Or, to put it differently, by focusing on the purchaser the BIIA would seek to “create an informed, design conscious public whose demands British manufacturers would find irresistible.”<sup>10</sup>

- 6 The influence of the BIIA was felt in the highly successful British Empire Exhibition of 1924 in Wembley. Indeed, commercial marketing mixed with national prestige and fine art had become an important aspect of international exhibition culture after the Great Exhibition of 1851 and proved to be hugely popular with the public. At the British Empire Exhibition, Lawrence Weaver, the director of the United Kingdom exhibits, employed Oliver Hill to design the pottery section in the Palace of Industry. This was Hill’s first venture into exhibition design at a time when having sections designed by architects was a new approach. As the architectural historian Neal Shasore astutely highlighted, employing an architect also served as “the additional function of architects’ services for marketing products to industrial clients.”<sup>11</sup>
- 7 The Palace of Industry was one of the two largest individual buildings on the site; the other being the Palace of Engineering. Both buildings (separated by a boulevard) were there to “stimulate voluntary preferential trade between Britain and constituent parts of the empire.”<sup>12</sup> The fact that Weaver chose Hill for this section can be interpreted as a belief in Hill’s ability to make a difference in British exhibition design and the art of display. The purpose of the exhibition, Weaver stated was “to enlarge trade and increase prosperity.” In order to achieve this, artistic quality in display was essential, according to Weaver. He believed the gap between the arts and commerce was fatal to “good” design, and stressed that there was “no kind of art which is too good to be used in the service of industry and commerce.”<sup>13</sup>
- 8 It is important to draw attention to the marketing strategy that is proposed here, which emphasized the relationship between the supplier and the consumer. Indeed, many of the proposed works would come to be displayed as signed art objects and the fact that they were signed went a long way in bringing back the individualism that had been lost in many consumers’ eyes in mass production. The ceramicist William

Moorcroft, whose work was displayed in the pottery section, was known to personalize each piece of pottery with his own signature. The identification that consumers developed with a commodity associated with a named designer who possessed “good” taste and social standing—as design historian Penny Sparke asserted—would become increasingly important during the interwar period.<sup>14</sup> This marketing strategy also explains why designers such as Hill were ultimately criticized for not providing objects for the masses and instead pitching goods at the rich upper middle classes and upper-class liberal consumers. These contradictory elements, I believe, are key ingredients of the artistic debates of the period. It is within this context that the work of exhibition designers such as Hill should be contextualized and interpreted.

- 9 The following year, 1925, saw the BIIA involved in consultations with the Department for Overseas Trade for the British contribution to the “Exposition internationale des arts décoratifs et industriels modernes” in Paris. It is this contribution that seems to have highlighted a peak in dissatisfaction with post-World War I British design. The British contribution was deemed old fashioned, dull, aloof and lacking in any spirit of adventure. It was believed that Britain was out of touch with a general, modern post-war consumer’s lifestyle. Llewlyn Smith in his introductory survey of the 1925 exhibition pondered “how far again is the British reluctance to break with past practice a sign of vigorous persistence of living tradition, or how far is it the mere clinging of a parasitic plant which has lost the power of independent growth and life?”<sup>15</sup> Action needed to be taken if design standards were to be improved in line with the demands for market fashions.
- 10 Action came in the form of another committee. As publisher Noel Carrington remembered, “even the government felt something should be done and therefore adopted the usual course of appointing a Committee.”<sup>16</sup> It would be this committee and its report which would prove one of the key influential factors in setting up “The Exhibition of British Industrial Art in Relation to the Home.” The report envisioned exhibitions that would “serve a specially valuable purpose, in view of their appeal to the public and to their consequent influence upon the discriminating purchaser. A comprehensive exhibition scheme will stimulate both supply and demand, with resulting profit to the whole country.”<sup>17</sup> Whilst not everybody agreed with the report’s findings,<sup>18</sup> there were individuals such as Hill, who took it as their guide and inspiration in their battle to improve design through education.<sup>19</sup>

## Designing “The Exhibition of British Industrial Art in Relation to the Home”

- 11 The committee’s proposals regarding a permanent exhibition and the financing of this new design body were rejected by the government. Instead, temporary exhibitions were suggested.<sup>20</sup> This setback didn’t waver Hill’s determination to “bring this country out of its apathy.”<sup>21</sup> The proposed exhibition (with Hill as the exhibition architect and member of the executive committee) finally came to fruition after financial backing of £500 was promised by the magazine *Country Life*, to which Hill and his acquaintance, author and editor of *Country Life*, Christopher Hussey added £100 each. The influence of *Country Life* should not be underestimated. Research by architectural historians such as Elizabeth Darling has shown that in interwar Britain *Country Life* (especially with Hussey as its architectural editor) played a central part in bringing together key

writers, thinkers and patrons around the role of design in a mass society.<sup>22</sup> The remaining funds were provided by a variety of industrialists and philanthropists who supported the arts, such as Phillip Sassoon, C.H. St John Hornby, Samuel Courtald and Lord Aberconway. This list of businessmen shows that the desire for a connection between art and industry was sought after not only from a business perspective but also encouraged by the arts.

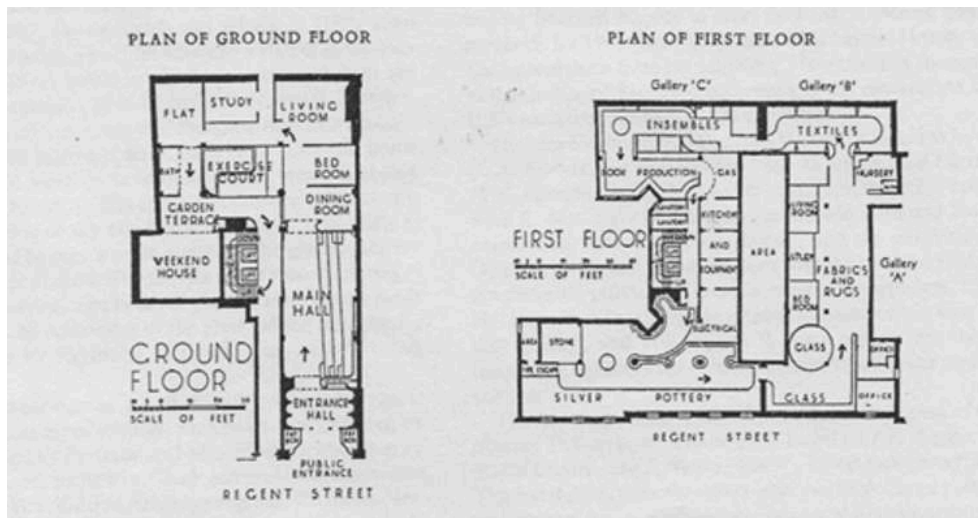
The choice of location can also be understood within this context. Indeed, the Dorland Hall on Regent Street was part of the London branch of the American Dorland Advertising Agency with the advertising agent George W. Kettle at its helm. Advertising practitioners like Kettle were key figures in the professionalization of the industry during the early twentieth century when they helped “advertising to grow into a central and ‘normal’ feature of British consumer society.”<sup>23</sup> Kettle further understood that “the creation of marketing campaigns based on advertisements—was significant in shaping and supporting the economic growth of consumer culture in Britain following the First World War.”<sup>24</sup> The Dorland Hall as exhibition venue seemed therefore apt as Hill would be assured that the exhibition would meet with the venues’ ethos on the importance of educating the public in matters of “good” design. A letter between Hill and Kettle offers a glimpse into Hill’s thinking on different ways in which matters of “good” design could be brought into certain spheres of the public. Writing about a recent “visit to New York Hill and the big stores,” Hill wrote that he became convinced on the importance of this matter, stating that:

“The stores are the only shop window the general public have, and their standard of taste is determined by the goods they see there displayed. In New York I found that these periodic exhibitions in the big stores are arranged by outside people, whose individual taste sets a standard above the ordinary, and it would be a great thing if the London stores would follow the same procedure and provide periodical exhibitions in their stores, using equipment already stocked in the various departments, and selected, arranged and set by acknowledged authorities in the matters of taste<sup>25</sup>.”

- 12 In New York, Macy’s was breaking ground as a tastemaker as early as 1927 by organizing exhibitions in co-operation with the Metropolitan Museum of Art. The objective was to join commerce and culture in order to educate the public in “good” design. This partnership proved to be hugely successful in that it reached large sections of the American public, which the museum would not have otherwise reached. For its part, the museum gave the department store enhanced artistic credibility.<sup>26</sup> Pushing the educational factor beyond mere display, lectures were organized that attracted people and extended press coverage. A similar idea was discussed in the Dorland Hall minutes, as it was suggested that lectures relating to the exhibition should be arranged by the *Design and Industries Association*.<sup>27</sup>
- 13 Hill took further inspiration from American department stores in the way that he put various objects on display, with their retail prices prominent. The display of prices put the exhibition within the visitor’s ideological framework, as most of them would have been very familiar with the various successful London department stores such as Selfridges. By displaying objects in this way, Hill saw the visiting public as consumers. By acknowledging that consumers had a choice Hill as an exhibition designer seems to have already foreseen that a marketing orientation would become popular in the latter part of the twentieth century, as he acknowledged the needs and desires of costumers.

This approach would become key in making profits, and this strategy seems to have been clearly understood by the department stores on either side of the Atlantic.

Ill. 2: Oliver Hill, final plans of the Dorland Hall exhibition, 1933.



© Alan Powers, "Oliver Hill as Exhibition Designer," *Thirties Society Journal* 7, 1989, p. 31.

- 14 The final section of the plan (Ill. 2) seems to have been influenced by the free flow interiors that were used in department stores. Free flow and curvilinear display promoted interaction between the viewer and the objects, as Staniszewski has pointed out, but it also made the flow of visitors through the exhibition or store much easier.<sup>28</sup> The public entered the Dorland Hall from Regent Street where they were greeted by three niches on either side that went from floor to ceiling. The center niche on the right hand side contained the sculpture "Man and Woman" (1933) by Charles Wheeler and Eric Gill whilst flanking niches showed implements and tools by Nettlefolds Ltd. (Ill. 3).

III. 3: Oliver Hill, Charles Wheeler, Eric Gill and Nettlefold, entrance vestibule, "Exhibition of British Industrial Art in Relation to the Home," Dorland Hall, London, 1933.



© Dell & Wainwright / RIBA, London.

- 15 The central niche on the opposite showed industrial stoneware by Doulton and Co. (Ltd.) and the wall nearby displayed masks by Lawrence Bradshaw. All the walls in this entrance vestibule were executed in Marplax, whilst the floors were made from Biancola with silver red-glass inlays and mosaics. From the entrance vestibule, people entered the Main Hall (also designed by Hill) where they found wall paneling on either end and at the back a range of Empire Timber Veneers. All these displays were indirectly lit with decorative lighting in the corner pillars and curtain lighting effects. The rest of the ground floor was made up of a range of furnished rooms where visitors could see objects intended for use. The back hall showed a dining room designed by Ambrose Heal, a bedroom designed by Raymond McGrath, a living room designed by R.W. Symonds, a study designed by R.D. Russel, a minimum flat by Wells Coates (Ill. 4), a bathroom and an exercise court designed by Hill, a weekend house by Serge Chermayeff (Ill. 5), and a display of PLAN furniture and chairs together with an exhibit of photographs by *Country Life* of the contemporary home (Ill. 6).

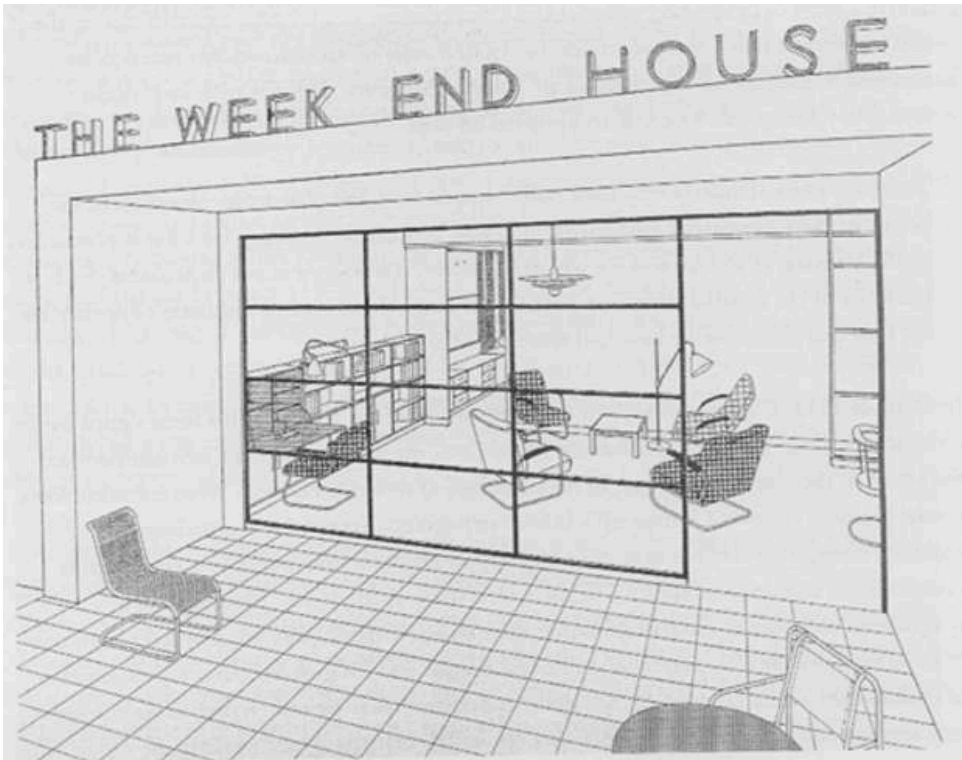


III. 4: Wells Coates, "Isokon Minimum Flat," "Exhibition of British Industrial Art in Relation to the Home," Dorland Hall, London, 1933.



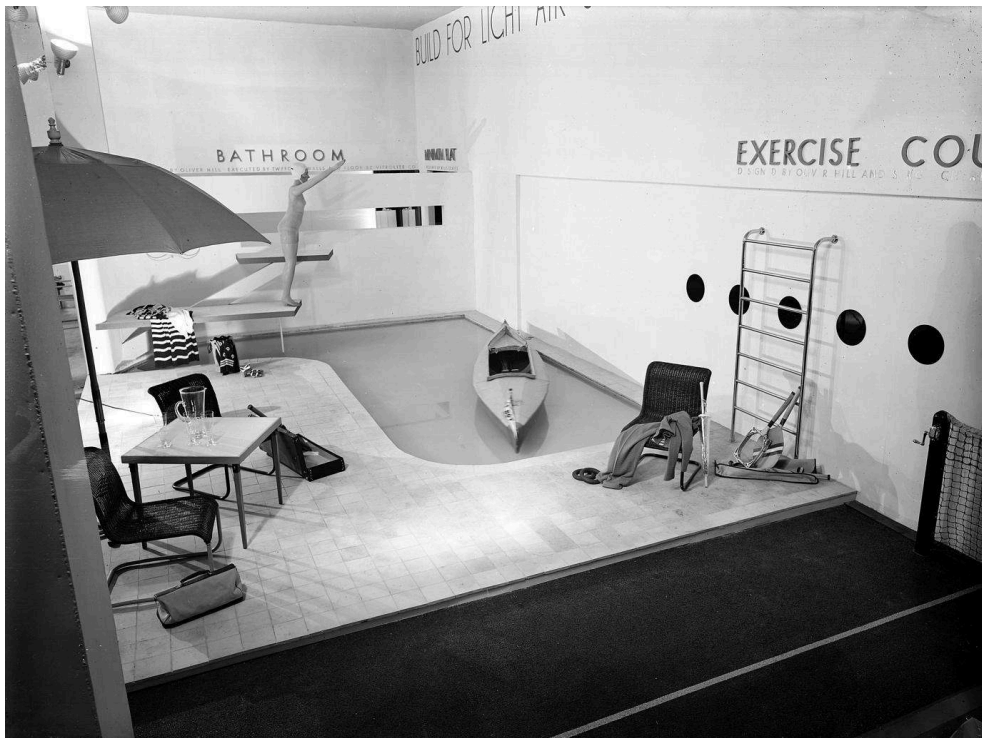
© Unfinished manuscript *Design For Today*, 1933. Pritchard Papers, reference GB 1187 PP/15/1/17/1. Courtesy of the University of East Anglia, Norwich.

III. 5: Serge Chermayeff, "Weekend House," "Exhibition of British Industrial Art in Relation to the Home," Dorland Hall, London, 1933.



© Alan Powers, *Serge Chermayeff: Designer Architect Teacher*, London, RIBA Publications, 2001.

**III. 6: Oliver Hill and Serge Chermayeff, "Exercise Court," "Exhibition of British Industrial Art in Relation to the Home," Dorland Hall, Regent Street, London, 1933.**



© Dell & Wainwright / RIBA, London.

**III. 7: Oliver Hill and Eric Gill, "Stone Dining Room," "Exhibition of British Industrial Art in Relation to the Home," Dorland Hall, Regent Street, London, 1933.**



© Dell & Wainwright / RIBA, London.

- 16 The free flow plan was continued on the first floor. Here the visitor first saw kitchens and their equipment section. The exhibition catalogue explained that these kitchens showed “[...] equipment sensibly placed for normal usage and in the right relationship one piece to another. These layouts are therefore something of a compromise between an actual kitchen and a display stand [...]”<sup>29</sup>
- 17 Past the electrical section one could find ensemble rooms largely designed by Hill. The stone exhibit incorporated a dining room complete with walls, floor, a table and chairs made of polished Perrycot Portland Stone (ill. 7). Here Hill wanted to show the possibilities of the stone “hitherto unused because of its coarseness. Now, however, the stone was electrically carborundum polished for the first time in England.”<sup>30</sup> The walls of this room were engraved by Eric Gill with a design symbolizing hospitality. Hill’s enthusiasm for this method went as far as including cups, plates and dishes made entirely out of stone. A similar approach could be seen in the glass display showing a boudoir made out of glass. The floor was made out of three-inch glass cubes (which in some parts were left clear and in others silvered on the underside). The walls consisted of curved sheets of plate glass from floor to ceiling with a stippled face, displayed an engraved figure cut with a carborundum wheel whilst the white opaque glass pilasters were sandblasted. Hill also used the latest techniques as this was the first time furniture had been produced entirely out of glass. The glass couch resting on solid glass balls was selected by H.G. Wells for his film *Things to Come*.
- 18 The remaining sections of the first floor were divided into galleries A, B and C. The catalogue announced that the contents of these galleries were selected by a committee of experts and that the objects they included had to be expressions of twentieth century spirit, and to conform to internationally accepted standards of good taste. It was explained to the visitor that, here, he or she would only find the best modern types available in England at the time. The exhibits in these galleries included textiles (furnishing and dress fabrics), leather, oil-silk and linoleum, carpets, rugs, wallpapers and ensembles or furnished rooms.<sup>31</sup> These rooms demonstrated, and inadvertently educated visitors and consumers, about what the modern home should look like. Hill displayed a bedroom and a nursery ensemble, commercial decorator Arundell Clarke designed “the study for a ruling prince,” and a living room was by the Bath Cabinet Makers.

## Reception and Reviews

- 19 The exhibition was a huge public hit. In three and a half weeks the attendance was 30,000, a number as Hussey claimed, “far exceeding the liveliest hopes of the committee.”<sup>32</sup> This success was also echoed in the letters Hill received. Marion Dorn wrote that “[e]verybody is raving about the exhibition and I think it’s going to be a wonderful help to everyone.”<sup>33</sup> Overall, Hill was mostly praised for making a visit to the Dorland Hall an experience that, as one journalist put it was “the clearest most generally attractive that we have ever seen.”<sup>34</sup>
- 20 However, not all comments were positive. A recurring opinion among critics was the fact that many of the exhibits showcased a “Bond Street Flavour.” The English cartoonist, author, art critic and stage designer Osbert Lancaster would come to use vocabulary such as this to discuss twentieth century period styles. His line-drawings

and accompanying titles such as “Vogue regency” published in *Pillar to Post* (1938) and *Homes Sweet Homes* (1939) had entered architectural criticism and were regularly used to poke fun at popular design styles.<sup>35</sup> W.G. Thorpe, who worked on the pottery and glass section, also went to considerable lengths in making comments on the organization of the exhibition. In his twenty-five-page letter he mentions in dismay that “the glassroom and the stone room were of no practical utility to any sane man; sitting on stone benches is not only uncomfortable, but may have disastrous consequences.”<sup>36</sup> He goes on to mention that there was “[...] nothing for the clerk or the artisan who makes £4 a week. There might be in a future exhibition two rooms for the man at £4 a week to show how good colour and design may be available in quite inexpensive materials.”<sup>37</sup>

- 21 Both of Hill’s ensembles seemed to have suffered from misunderstandings, as the stone and glass room were never meant to be taken at face value. Hill particularly objected to comments regarding his stone exhibit mentioning that he merely had no other purpose than to demonstrate the beauty of English Portland stone.<sup>38</sup> However, comments regarding the exclusivity of certain exhibits indicated a more deeply rooted problem with how the masses were to be “educated.” Hill’s imaginative and enjoyable displays and their use of luxurious materials were viewed with suspicion by fellow exhibitors such as Serge Chermayeff and Wells Coates who in their eyes were working tirelessly to “civilize” the working-class taste. Voicing his concern Coates wrote to Hill in 1932:

“I assume as indeed I intimated during our conversation that you and your co-organisers would not object to an exhibit which would demonstrate the economic possibilities of an orderly use of modern materials and methods, for as you know, I am chiefly interested in this aspect of design and certainly not in a purely decorative, or shall I say purely imaginative use of the modern materials which we all use and want to use these days.”<sup>39</sup>

- 22 Chermayeff was to say later that “[u]nfortunately, decorative mountains have been made out of Oliver Hill, which loom large in the public eye but do not represent the industrial machine age at all.”<sup>40</sup>

## Showy and Pompous

- 23 These and Hill’s visions of the exhibits highlight seemingly competing attitudes towards modern architecture and its public. According to architects like Coates and Chermayeff, there was a bogus modernism (more than likely a reference to the work of people such as Hill) which “assumes the transitory or accidental characteristics of the real thing and exploits its fashion value, without possessing either its rational justification or its artistic integrity.”<sup>41</sup> The “real thing” that was referred to was design that insisted on simplicity and viewed decoration as desecration.<sup>42</sup> Bogus modernism on the other hand embraced and responded to various changes in architecture and society and was therefore deemed as superficial hence unable to educate the public in matters of “good” design as this kind of modernism demonstrated luxury and glamor instead of the sober functionalism of the “real thing.” Such ideas were to be exemplified by the “Minimum Flat” by Coates (Ill. 4) and the “Weekend House” by Chermayeff (Ill. 5). Although these exhibits are usually described as examples that promote the social role of architecture, I want to argue that all of the exhibits can be interpreted in this way. The exhibitors had one goal in mind namely “elevating the consumer’s taste.” Both viewpoints were incorporated within the exhibition manifesto as the section on the

exhibits states: “The principles that the committee will have before them are: (1) Sound and economical design (i.e. suitability for industrial production), (2) Fitness for purpose, (3) The imaginative use of materials.”<sup>43</sup>

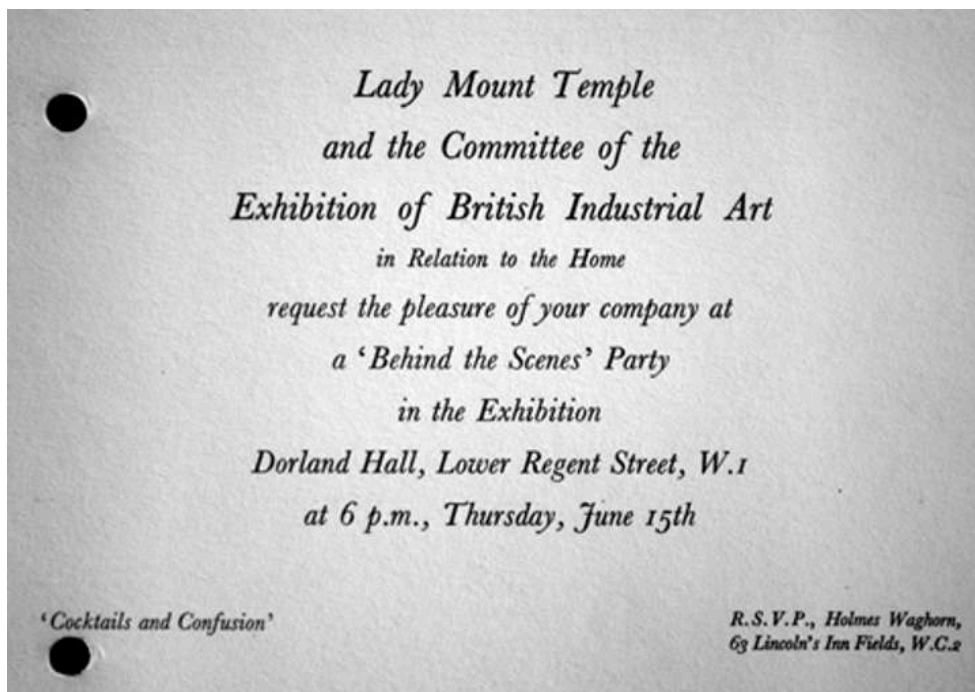
- 24 The exhibition organizers argued that the success of the consumer’s education was dependent on the successful appreciation of “good” design. I would argue that Hill not only saw this happening through a concurrent reform of art education in schools but also by giving the exhibition visitors a stimulating and enjoyable experience. Architects like the aforementioned Coates and Chermayeff saw the improvement of industrial design as a moral duty, in which the simple pleasures of “shoddy design” had to be eliminated. Or, as the architectural historian Nikolaus Pevsner would say, in his *Inquiry into Industrial Art in England*:

“A splendour which reality does not concede is brought into our humble surroundings by meretricious industrial products, which achieve in permanence some of the elating effect that for a few hours is bestowed upon us by the Hollywood heroes’ fantastic mode of life in the pictures.”<sup>44</sup>

- 25 As Christine Atha has rightfully pointed out, such comments point towards established social mores.<sup>45</sup> The moral duty that Pevsner was referring to was specifically aimed at reforming the British working classes, as it was deemed by him that their homes and tastes were deplorable. He believed that design reform would ameliorate this situation. Such an idea would increasingly become part of the political agenda after the Second World War. Showy and pompous design (which referred to design by architects such as Hill) would not help in elevating the taste of the masses but would just add to the distance between the wealthy and the poor which, according to Pevsner, was larger in England than in central Europe. It was therefore “one of the reasons why England has been late in adopting this international style.” Pevsner suggested that “[...] a style of our age must be an unexclusive style, and its merits must be collective merits not distinguishing one individual or one class.”<sup>46</sup> The “Bond Street Flavour” of Hill’s designs were therefore deemed by some as socially unaware.
- 26 Nevertheless, Hill’s designs for the Dorland Hall proved to be huge hits, which showed that they provided pleasure and joy. They held value for visitors, as the visual imagery was helpful in educating the consumer by showing the public what was possible and acceptable. The financial success of the exhibition showed that Hill was fully aware of what commercial forces drove the mass market. In my opinion it was this understanding of the mass market which made the exhibition such a success. As the Dorland Hall exhibition was organized on a shoestring budget, it was imperative that the exhibitors didn’t go home with any financial burden. Instead, it was paramount to focus on the consumer of moderate means as well as attracting the higher end of the market; the people that would be able to buy the goods on display.<sup>47</sup> The consumer was therefore seen as an active participant in the exhibition’s overall success instead of merely being passive.
- 27 The role of the press also needs to be acknowledged as another important factor in the success of the Dorland Hall exhibition. Extensive press coverage played a big part in the success, or lack of it. The exhibition committee decided to pay for advertising in newspapers such as *The Times*, the *Observer*, *The Morning Post*, the *Daily Telegraph* as well as weeklies such as *The Listener* and the *New Statesman*. It was further suggested that sandwich men might be useful and if funds became available later on, it was decided to approach more specialist magazines such as the *Architectural Review*, the *Architects’*

*Journal and Design for Today*. The committee prioritized the publicity committee as first in line to receive the “gate money for re-investment in advertising propaganda.”<sup>48</sup> The wide range of magazines and newspapers evidences that the organizers were keen to communicate their ideas to a broad public, thereby giving the impression that not attending would be the equivalent to missing out an event of great importance.<sup>49</sup> To further ensure success the organizing committee decided on a “behind the scenes” party called “cocktails and confusion” (a title more telling of its organizer than the exhibition itself) (Ill. 8) held at the Dorland Hall on June 15<sup>th</sup> 1933. Hosted by Lady Mount Temple, it was agreed that “various gossip writers attached to the daily press should be invited” and it was deemed beneficial that this party should be held on a Thursday or Friday “in order to enable the Sunday papers to benefit.”<sup>50</sup> Exhibitors were involved as they were also seen as in the habit of advertising and “should be persuaded to tie-up their advertising with the exhibition.”<sup>51</sup>

Ill. 8: Invitation to a “behind the scenes” party: “cocktails and confusion.”



© RIBA, London, ref. HiO 28/3 Dorland Hall – Lower Regent Street London W1 1932-33.

- 28 My analysis of the “Industrial Art in Relation to the Home Exhibition” shows the importance of exhibitions during the interwar period as barometers for gauging the public response to various forms of “good” design. It also proves instructive in understanding the various ideas and competing ideologies that were at work during this period. Hill’s designs for the exhibition showed how ideas on design reform were at play and how exhibition design formed a navigational tool not only for the visitor, but also for the exhibitor. Hill clearly took it as an opportunity to engage with market forces and he successfully created a visual language aimed at educating the consumer in “good” design. As a marketing strategy, his approach emphasized the important relationship between supplier and customer. Although appearance is important in exhibition design, it is its anatomy which proves crucial in unearthing complex messages that were communicated through this visual imagery, which should be seen

as a barometer of ideologies (of often contradictory elements) that were part and parcel of design strategies before the Second World War in Britain.

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## NOTES

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3. Mary Anne Staniszewski, *The Power of Display: A History of Exhibition Installations at the Museum of Modern Art*, Cambridge, Massachusetts, MIT Press, 2001, p. 27.
4. "What the Public Wants," *The Listener*, n°276, April 25, 1934, p. 692.
5. Cathy Ross, *Twenties London: A City in the Jazz Age*, London, Philip Wilson Publishers, 2003, p. 78.
6. Jane Alexandra Webb, *An Analysis of the Select Committee on Arts and Manufacturers of 1835-1836: Anatomy, Benthamism and Design*, unpublished PhD thesis, University of Wolverhampton, 2003, p. 1.
7. Mervyn Romans, *Histories of Art Design Education: Collected Essays*, Bristol, Intellect, 2005, p. 51-52.
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9. *Ibid.*
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## ABSTRACTS

Throughout the interwar period many dialects of modernist visual languages were developed and often mediated by the technologies of photography, film, and design. This negotiation of modernity was a key feature characterizing the exhibition designs of architect Oliver Hill (1887-1968). Taking Hill's designs for the "Exhibition of British Industrial Art in Relation to the Home" at Dorland Hall in 1933 as a starting point, this paper investigates Hill's commitment to consumer education. Exhibition designs, such as at Dorland Hall, proved a perfect vehicle for Hill's educational imperatives in elevating consumers' understanding of "good design." Through a close reading this paper highlights how Hill embraced fashionability, both in terms of market consumerism and in terms of the power that fashion had on improving taste and standards in design during that time.

Durant la période de l'entre-deux-guerres, plusieurs formes de langages visuels modernistes furent développés et souvent médiatisés par les technologies de la photographie, du film et du design. Cette manière de traiter la modernité est une notion clé pour caractériser les expositions de design de l'architecte Oliver Hill (1887-1968). En prenant pour point de départ les plans de Hill pour l'« Exhibition of British Industrial Art in Relation to the Home » à Dorland Hall en 1933, cet article étudie l'engagement de Hill à éduquer le consommateur. Les expositions de design telles que celles de Dorland Hall se révélèrent un vecteur parfait pour les visées éducatives de Hill, à savoir soutenir la compréhension du consommateur de ce qu'est un « bon design ». À travers une étude approfondie, cet article montre comment Hill s'est emparé de la mode du moment, à la fois

en termes de consommation de marché et du pouvoir d'influence de cette mode en vue d'améliorer le goût et les standards du design durant cette période.

## INDEX

**Mots-clés:** Expositions, entre-deux-guerres, Grande Bretagne, Oliver Hill, design, goût, scénographie, modernisme, bon design

**Keywords:** Exhibitions, interwar, Great Britain, Oliver Hill, design, taste, exhibition design, modernism, good design

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