

CONTEMPORARY SCULPTURE FOR CONTEMPORARY BUILDINGS
BY
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Architecture is the expression of the spiritual and material needs of humanity, evolved by each race in unique and inevitable forms.

Architecture and sculpture have their foundation in the same principles of inner structure. They are one in the spirit. The great works of decorative sculpture have always been an organic part of the edifice for which they were designed. Egypt, Assyria, Greece furnish the most convincing examples.

^{because}
The Egyptians were a nation of mathematicians, of builders, of engineers. Their statues expressed the laws of architecture and of engineering through the proportions of the human body. They saw a statue as structural volumes in relation to each other. This relation and nothing else makes the beauty of sculpture. The Egyptian and Babylonian astronomers had developed mathematics to a high degree, but Pythagoras was the first who formulated the laws of the universe by the principle of abstract numbers. In the Doric temple, this principle found expression in stone. (I doubt this) ^{pld}

The details of Phidias' figures in the pediment of the Parthenon are subordinated to the general rhythm of each figure, and the masses of the figures are subordinated to the proportions of columns, architrave and pediment. The structural planes of the human forms are conceived in close relation to the plane of the wall before which they stand. Because each individual volume is right as a part, the sum total, the edifice in its completeness is ^{mathematically} right and, at the same time, aesthetically perfect.

Could you
make this
more simply
evident?
pld

mathematically
and why not
part of the word "structurally"

The Parthenon, as an artistic conception, is one great piece of sculpture. *(Carayon, but not the art) plus*

Never has the science of sculpture been more clearly defined than in the temples of Hellas and - once more, two thousand years later, - in the cathedrals of France.

True - but imitative sculpture. plus

his word do? { Sculpture is logic, quickened by the emotional and aesthetic sensibility of the artist. *expression*

Each great work of art is the echo of the mental attitude of its age towards the universe, because the creative artist is one who most intensely feels the inner rhythm of the period he lives in. Throughout the history of art, the human body is the main object of artistic interpretation, and though certain animal and plant forms have likewise been represented, it has been the supreme symbol of a conception of the world whose center was man. Within this conception, it was natural to represent speed by the winged feet of Hermes or by the eagle, strength and power by Hercules or the lion, beauty and humility by the subtle curve of the female body.

? { Leaving aside all symbolic meanings, we observe that for milleniums, the artists, when they looked at the animal world, were impressed, only with *the forms of* such animals whose movements were somehow related to the movements of the human body.

Through the development of modern technique and industry, the human and animal bodies have lost their significance as sources of power and means of transportation and locomotion. [Today, steam and electricity perform in a fraction of time what human and animal muscles did from the time of the first Pharaohs up to only two or three generations ago. Motor cranes hoist steel girders in a few

seconds to the fiftieth story of a rising office building. With the express engine, the automobile, the aeroplane, the radio, man has grown far beyond his own physical forms and functions.]

is a matter of the scale of the human form only. [Protagoras' sentence that "Man is the measure of all things" has lost all meaning. When we move from place to place, we push a handle and step on a button: motion, today, is a process of rolling. Invention has transformed muscular flexibility into rotation of rigid metal.

[If our familiarity with ocean liners, Pullman cars, motors, subways and flying machines has so far influenced only an astonishingly small number of creative artists, it is probably because all machine forms-and-movements are in a pronounced contrast to the forms and movements of the human body; that is to say: to the traditional basis of our conception of beauty and of art.] The only forms of living organisms to which the lines of a steamer or of an aeroplane might be compared are those of certain insects, *equipped with water- or air-propelle.*

[The advent of technique has confronted the artists with problems of form that never before existed. An industrial revolution with unheard of consequences separates our era from all past periods of history.] The inventions and discoveries of today are of a much deeper immediate influence on life than the religious upheavals in the 13th century or the discoveries of Columbus, Vasco da Gama and Copernicus at the time of the Medici. Yet those events contributed a great deal to the character of two of the greatest epochs of art: the Gothic period and the Renaissance. How much more, then, are we justified in expecting an entirely new artistic expression from this century! Unfortunately, however, we have all styles of the past at our disposal and it is so much easier to imitate than to create in

the extraordinarily new spirit of our own time. But there are artists who realize that our modes of living and our ways of thinking have nothing more to do with those of the ancient Greeks or of the contemporaries of Palladio and Bramante, and who draw their logical conclusions from the existence of machinery and from the example of the engineer. It still happens, however, that public libraries, bank and government buildings - though inwardly constructed of steel and concrete - are camouflaged as Greek temples (equipped with steam heat, elevators, typewriters, vacuum cleaners, a telephone system and all the rest of modern conveniences like electric light, plumbing and mail chutes); and ninety-nine out of a hundred are not at all aware how grotesque their Spanish, Tudor or Renaissance rooms look, while they, dressed in tuxedos and modern evening gowns, dance to the orthophonic or listen to a concert five thousand miles away. If, on the other hand, our bankers and government officials should suddenly yield to an irresistible feeling for style, they would have to walk to their offices draped in togas, laurel wreaths on their heads and sandals on their feet!

In his "Decline of the West," Oswald Spengler points out that historical art forms exist and are true only once, that is to say, only in the period in which they grew naturally out of the practical and aesthetic needs of its culture. The only people who create forms which are essentially of this time and have never existed before are the few builders of thoroughly contemporary skyscrapers, the engineer and the inventor.

Some of the latest office buildings in New York and Chicago

to the same or in
 bastard -
 of a true
 action of
 own
 -
 this

*confusion of language and
abandon of ideal.*

*any the
elegance.
like they did.*

- monuments to the genius of some of our greatest architects, -
reflect in their general design and in every detail of their
decoration, contemporary thought. That is what the Doric temple
which contemporary thought *is trying to*
did, and the Gothic cathedral. That is what finds expression in
the latest architectural tendencies in France, Germany, Holland
and the Scandinavian countries.

We are no longer a religious people, and if we build
churches, we imitate, without feeling or inward necessity, the
Romanesque or the Gothic. The skyscraper-office-building, as
the immediate result of economic, practical and other conditions,

should be

is the most significant symbol of this era. Aesthetically
complete results, however, could only be achieved, *were* because the
architects in question *to be* are also gifted with the feeling for
organization of masses and their relation to each other, - with
sound construction characteristics of materials as well as for
the feeling for light-and-shadow effects and for proportions.

In other words: these architects are also sculptors, by instinct,
They are not architects.
just as were the builders of Egypt and of Greece. The sculptor

of today is only a sculptor if he is also an architect, which
architectural resources
means: if he is able to think in terms of modern architecture,
instead of in terms of anatomy or of the academic life class.

All decorative realism is, naturally, out of place in *any* building
~~of steel and concrete~~, - just as are Corinthian columns that have
nothing to carry and plaster arches that are without function -
glued on the surface of perfectly reliable reinforced concrete.

The contemporary sculptor, as an intimate collaborator
of the architect or builder in steel, cannot, indeed, be what he
when buildings were built in stone.
was. The former manufacturer of draped monuments and the copyist

of historically sanctioned ornamentations can only destroy instead of emphasize the clarity and directness of the steel skeleton ^{or the modern method}. Realistic or vaguely stylized nudes, lions and peacocks, as one still sees them on otherwise quite contemporary recent buildings, kill, of course, the entire artistic effect, since such "decorative" elements are without any relation to the purpose of the building and ^{have no} relation to the spirit of the period we live in. What can a bas relief of a "prancing steed" possibly mean to us who are used to thinking in terms of thousands of horse power? The reason of the existence of such zoological images on a building of the twentieth century can only be that former centuries cannot show us how to transform and re-create mechanical forms into art forms.

Considering the character of the ^{truly} modern steel structure, considering also that such a building is, in itself ^{also} a sculpture on a gigantic scale, we come to the conclusion that the sculptor who collaborates with the architect-engineer at its decoration must realize that the sculpture of the past was a natural and logical product of the period and of the building material which formed it. He must be able to invent forms which in spirit and line ^{are} one with the idea of ^{glass, plastic building materials} steel and ^{concrete}, as well as with the new manner of motion that technique and invention have given to the world of today. Of this motion, the wheel, or rather the cog wheel, is the basic element. (How about electrical currents?) Kinetic energy?

One very important contemporary factor will - and already does - play a great role in the decoration of buildings: electric light. With the aid of powerful flood lights, the sculptor-architect can not only apply colour in a much more interesting way than did

the ancients, but, as he can work with constantly changing shades of light, he can produce effects of unlimited possibilities. We have already examples here and abroad where intelligent and well calculated use of lighting arrangements has lead to the most surprising results. Automatically controlled floodlights can change shape, height and character of a building so radically that it may lose all bodiliness and may begin to move with light advertisements, signs and traffic. Besides being, of course, absolutely "durable," such ever-changing light effects can with further perfection create a night-architecture quite different from the daylight city. Decorative sculpture, conceived - like the building itself - in simplified, mechanistic forms can produce shadow effects that will give it an even more important function than during the day: The sculptor-electrician can carry experiences of the motion picture camera into his rigid blocks of concrete, glass and mirrors, and can arrive at effects of enchanting playfulness and fantastic illusions. (The entire absence of sculptural decorations outside and of pictures inside, gives to the buildings of certain contemporary European architects a utilitarian dryness and uninviting meagerness which can never be counterbalanced by the doubtless interesting placing of windows, doors and stairways.)

Sculpture in more or less abstract forms, and in almost any of our new materials, played upon ^{or emitting or reflecting} by electric light, must, in its further development, create a unit of decoration thoroughly in keeping with the contemporary thought of the ^{organism} steel structure.

Born out of the spirit of this very period, it will bring to the minds of the people the tremendous distance which separates

their lives from all past periods of history.

As an integral part of the building, it will finally make those realize their mental laziness who continue to build up historical ruins as symbols of the past, instead of erecting living buildings as symbols of the present and of future growth.

If the new art forms, which contemporary architecture needs, are based on an understanding of the past, but developed in harmony with the wider possibilities resulting from ^{and necessary to life in} this mechanistic age, they will, in time, appear as the natural continuation of the great tradition in the history of art.

Very good Rome letter!
Send it in - tho you gave the "bastards" too much.
I am sensible of my fault in getting this back to you from South America instead of North America.
The fault is compounded of personal idiosyncrasies, accidents, mixed purposes - etc increasing as appropriate time went by.

I hope you will excuse the seeming neglect of you and your manuscript.

One good piece of the sculpture you imagine herein would be worth a train load of MSS.

Writing is getting to be something anybody can do - Sculpture nobody seems able to do -

My best to you in the "claire de lune" of the last

F. L. W.

TALESIN
SPRING
GREEN
WISCONSIN

FRANK L. ...

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