

MAGAZINE OF ART

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ALFRED FRANKENSTEIN: ART AND MUSIC

RICHARD LIPPOLD: SCULPTURE?

HENRY S. CHURCHILL: NEW YORK REZONED

CHARLES EAMES & HERBERT BAYER: DESIGN, DESIGNER AND INDUSTRY

MAGAZINE OF ART

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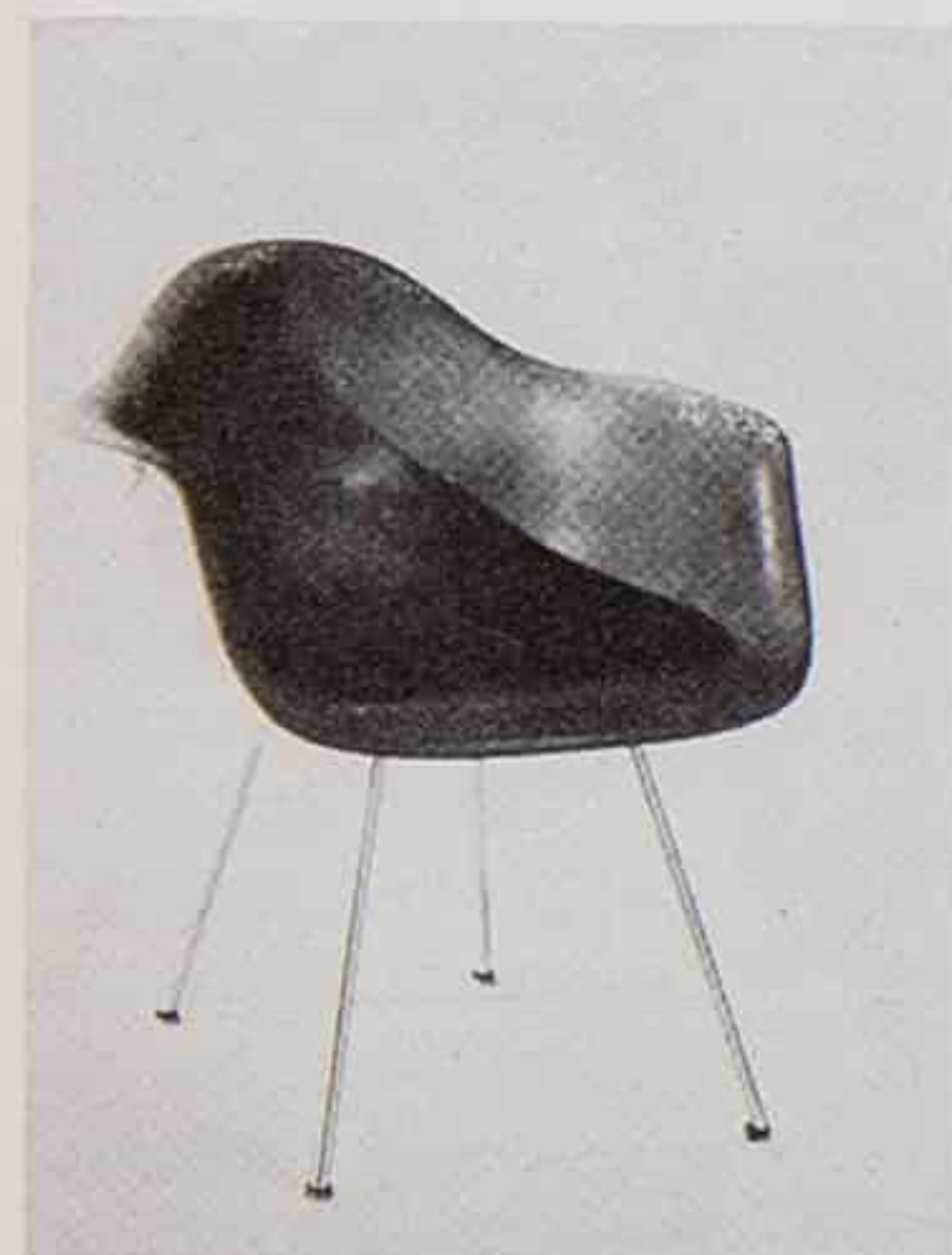
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DESIGN, DESIGNER AND INDUSTRY

THE two talks printed here were delivered late in June this year at Aspen in the Colorado Alps, where officials of the Container Corporation of America invited some two hundred business executives, product designers, graphic designers and educators to consider the role of design in business today. In the course of four days' conferences, one issue stood out: businessmen considered design a good gambit in the contest for profits, while responsible designers argued that competitive advantages was a poor goal compared to the full development and wide distribution of human satisfactions, both spiritual and physical. The Aspen conference papers are now being considered for publication by the Yale University Press.

E. J. K., Jr.

Charles Eames



Molded plastic chair, 1950, manufactured by Herman Miller Furniture Company

IN the course of one of the earlier sessions of this conference, Don Wallace, touching lightly on the many facets of the relationship of design to industry, made one observation that caused spontaneous murmurs to run through the audience. This was a remark made from the consumer's standpoint that may serve as a warning against design with more integration than integrity. A consumer product may be so loaded with shelf-appeal that its victory over competition is immediate, up to and including the point of sale. But its true value will not be known until the consumer takes it home and lives with it. Then, one of two things will usually happen. If after he has gotten it home the object becomes a rich and contributing part of his life, it will take on a

beauty and receive a love far, far greater than that which caused it to be picked from the shelf. If, however, in the proving laboratory of the consumer's home the object proves a fraud or fails in a great degree to perform, it will inevitably take on a sick kind of ugliness—all the more so for its pretence to be beautiful. Nothing could be worse, or more deserved, for the conscious manufacturer than such a switch.

Two examples of the design program within the Martin-Senour Company were shown to this conference by the company's president, Mr. Stuart. The first was an excellent sample color card, the result of a sincere attempt to raise the performance standards of a useful tool. But the second example, the wet-paint sign, I am afraid was not such a happy one. Perhaps in the enthusiasm of bringing modern painting into the program, shelf-appeal here got the better of function. Conceivably, someone *would* want to use that sign as a decoration for his rumpus room. But, functioning as a wet-paint sign, would it, in a crisis, ever stop you in time?

This is a part of the great trap, and we should be grateful for this reminder that some things can be so integrated and so "attractive" that they completely fail in the specific function which they should perform. This happens when clichés take over, whether they are the clichés of modern painting or of anything else. For the sake of our children's lives, let us hope that the traffic "Stop" signs never become so integrated!

The same thing often happens in the design of building materials. In an all-out effort to make their product "attractive," the manufacturers so art it up that it becomes impossible to make it hold its place as an element in building. Such super-appeal puts the architect, who must work with the elements, in the frustrating position of a painter who, reaching for a tube of pure color, finds plaids and polka dots coming out when he squeezes it.

Here I would like to quote from the brochure describing this conference. By taking this passage out of its context, I may be doing injustice to the thought; if so, I apologize.

"American business faces a new era and a new phase of competition. Because of the leveling or equalizing processes now generally practiced throughout industry (automatic machinery, uniform wage and marketing practices), the opportunities for effective competition based on traditional factors of price and quality of product have been greatly diminished.

"Competition of the present and future must be based on new factors, on the appearance, attractiveness and appeal of the product, and on the reputation of the companies who make and sell it. This involves the use of imagination and visual appeal not only in the design of the product itself, but in everything which associates the company with its product in the mind of the pub-

lic: advertising, printed matter, company offices, factories and displays."

The attitude and works of the man who made this statement are positive without question. That is demonstrated through the works of his company—the Container Corporation of America—and by our very presence at this conference. But the statement itself I find scary—as, I guess, I do all conscious effort towards shelf-appeal.

"We have gone as far as we can in quality and price; therefore we will add *art* to make this product attractive"? This thought is diametrically opposed to everything we try to stand for and work towards.

Have we, in fact, gone as far as we can in quality and price—service per dollar—standard of performance per man-hours work? Gone as far as we can? We've hardly started, and everyone here knows it.

The facets of performance of any product are innumerable—some measurable, many immeasurable; some perhaps of which we'll never be aware and which will only be solved intuitively. But every day some new need of performance is isolated and made calculable—and the way to increasing service for the dollar is made easier.

If there really is a desire to make the product good—that is, turn each consumer dollar into the highest standard of performance—then there must be goodness all the way down the line. This is the "integrated design program." To want the materials to be good, the package to be good, the delivery to be good, the printed matter, the office, the plant. And really to want the hours of each employee on the job to be good—and good for *him* or *her*; because if this is true, and the intention is really to make the life of the employee on the job a happy one, the steps are clear, and the relation of morale to goodness of product will take care of itself. But plant morale programs that start from the "let's increase the output" end, often fall into the same trap we have seen in respect to "shelf-appeal." They can get to *look* more than to *be*.

Let's scrutinize our objectives, look at them big, look at them small. . . .

When we think of great imagination and far-reaching perspective combined with infinite patience and attention to detail, we think of Leonardo da Vinci. We are often apt to think there are no Leonardos today, and as usual we are wrong, because there are. It's just that it is never a snap to apply such attitudes, even though in the long run they offer by far the greatest odds.

Among such great original thinkers we must certainly all be grateful for Buckminster Fuller. His is real perspective. I believe it was George Nelson who once said, "You know, Bucky somehow has the quality of looking at everything he sees as a child looking at it for the first time." What a great faculty that is! If any of us becomes momentarily complacent about the quality-cost ratio of our products, then it's high time to take another good look at Buckminster Fuller's attitude towards production standards—the total service he would provide per man-hours work.

He has pointed out that originality for the sake of being original is simply no good and can only lead to something that is, in the worst sense, derivative. To this we would all agree—whether we ourselves can avoid it completely or not. But Fuller goes further and suggests that if our objectives—our immediate objectives—are clear, and if we proceed, free from preconceived ideas, to work towards them, then the need for originality is gone—and the work stands a chance of being as big as the objective.

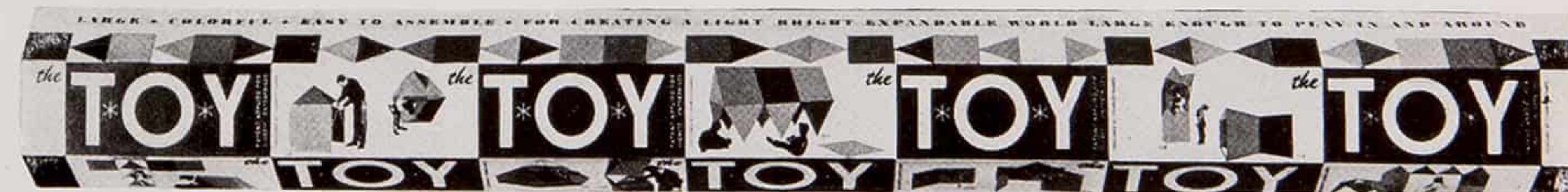
Sometimes it takes a new kind of courage to stop trying to be original and instead to examine the objective closely, to see what it really may be. As another example of Fuller's perspective, he says that the great advantage that education can provide to a student is "security in change." What a great gain that is over safety in the *status quo*!

Herbert Bayer's ads—such as the *House of Cards* on page 324—certainly do not come as the result of trying to be original. His works have an immediate objective, a real conception, a big idea. They are also real advertisements, not modern paintings. His objective was certainly clear, and he moved so directly towards its fulfilment that it enriched the thought, the product, the page and the life of the page-consumer. That's the way it should be with our own work—and I mean, you know, in every detail of our work. Not just the label on the package, but goodness in the package, the product, the plant, the people that make it, the way it is presented and thought of. No one will deny that these details, done better and to everyone's benefit, are often rewarding in unlooked for and surprising ways.

This is "Design, an Element of our Business"; this is "Integrated Design, a Concept of Order and Vision"; this is "What the Artist-Designer Offers Industry."

Let's make an honest-to-God effort to find out what good is. And if it is good, *do it*.

Container for The Toy, 1951, manufactured by Tigrett Enterprises, Chicago



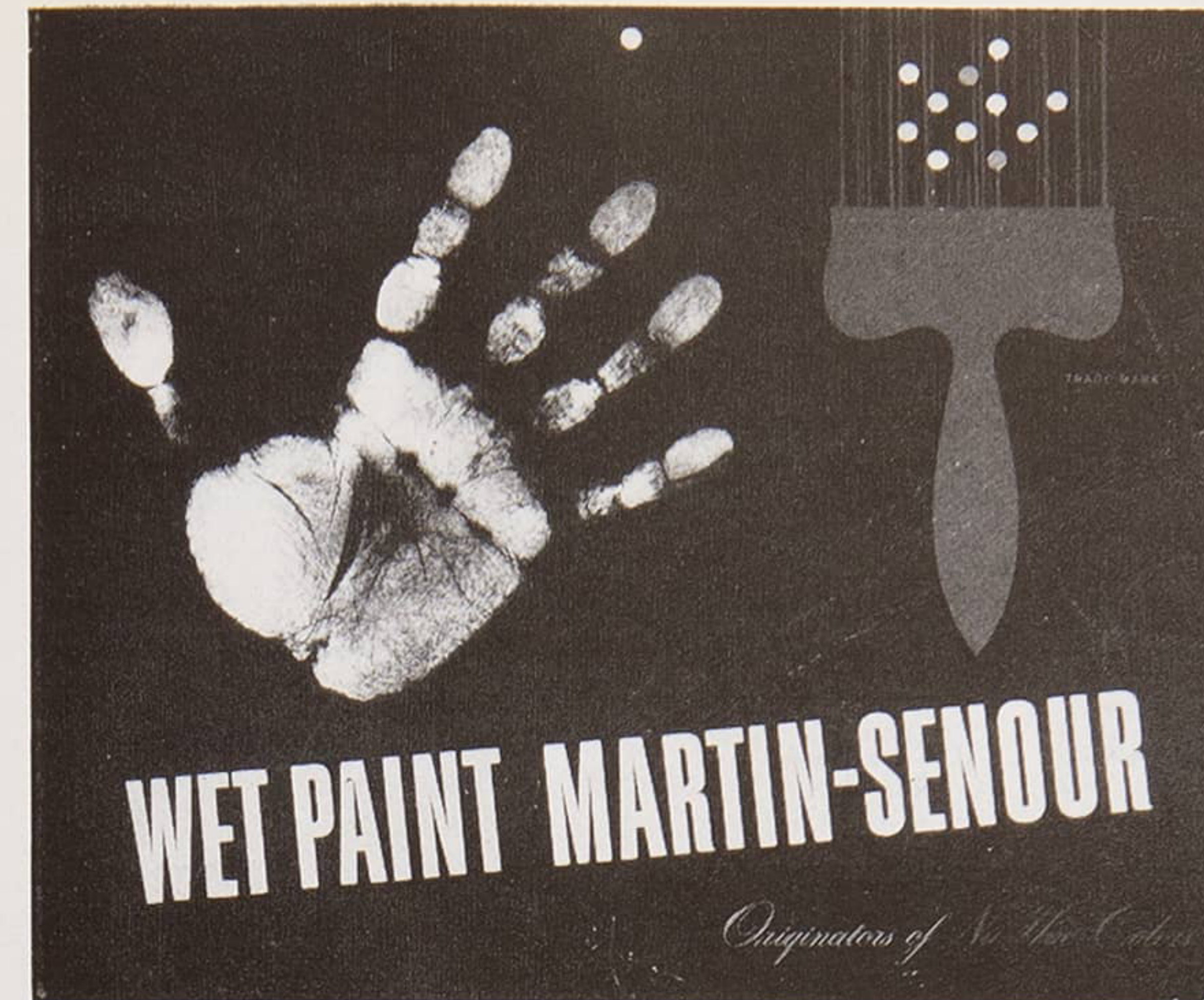


Richard Buckminster Fuller, Geodesic Dome,
Fuller Research Foundation, Canada



Charles and Ray Eames, Stabilizer skins, molded plywood,
manufactured by Evans Products Co., Los Angeles,
courtesy Museum of Modern Art

David S. Block,
Small advertisement for Seeman Bros., Inc.,
from 28th Annual of Editorial and Advertising Art
(New York, Pitman, 1949)



Wet Paint sign, Martin-Senour Company

A. M. Cassandre,
Advertisement for
Container Corporation of America,
1938



Martin Bauman,
Magazine advertisement for Weco Products Company,
from 28th Annual of Advertising and Editorial Art,
(New York, Pitman, 1949)

