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**HIGH MUSEUM OF ART EXHIBITION EXPLORES
100 YEARS OF INNOVATIVE LIGHTING DESIGN**

ATLANTA, June 16, 2021 — Since the invention of the first electric light in the 1800s to the development of ultraefficient lightbulbs in the 21st century, lighting technology has fascinated engineers, scientists, architects and designers worldwide, inspiring them toward new creative expression. This summer, the High Museum of Art is the exclusive Southeast venue for “Electrifying Design: A Century of Lighting” (July 2-Sept. 26), the first large-scale exhibition to consider electrical lighting from the past 100 years as a catalyst for technological and artistic innovation within major avant-garde design movements. The exhibition is organized by the Museum of Fine Arts, Houston (MFAH), where it debuted in February.

“Electrifying Design” features nearly 80 rare lighting examples by leading international designers including Achille Castiglioni, Christian Dell, Greta Magnusson Grossman, Poul Henningsen, Ingo Maurer, Verner Panton, Gino Sarfatti, Ettore Sottsass and Wilhelm Wagenfeld, among many others. The works on view demonstrate how these innovators harnessed light’s radiance and beauty, resulting in designs that extend beyond or challenge the functional nature of lighting.

“We’ve presented a number of exhibitions in recent years that explore the myriad ways that design influences, and enriches, our lives and shapes how we experience the world,” said Rand Suffolk, the High’s Nancy and Holcombe T. Green, Jr., director. “With this exhibition, we look at how lighting offered a path forward for groundbreaking designers to explore new territory and bring wonder to practical purposes.”

The High’s curator of decorative arts and design, Monica Obniski, added, “This exhibition demonstrates the ingenuity and creativity of these designers, who tested the limits of technology to address practical needs while at the same time demonstrating masterful artistry. In every sense of the word, it will be illuminating for our audience.”

“Electrifying Design” focuses on lighting’s contribution to design history, showing how it responded to advances in technology and materials as well as the adaptations of form during changing aesthetic movements. The exhibition is organized by themes into three sections: “Typologies,” “The Lightbulb” and “Quality of Light.” Each section includes works ranging from the 1920s to the present from the United States, Europe and Asia. The galleries also feature large-scale immersive experiences, including DRIFT’s “Flylight” (2015), which comprises LEDs in

glass tubes suspended from the ceiling. The tubes light up unpredictably in response to movement in the space, mimicking the behavior of a flock of birds.

Typologies

“Typologies” reflects the evolution of function and design within discreet forms: task lamps, floor lamps and ceiling lamps.

Designed for specific functions — such as stationed on desks, tables or pianos — task lamps are small-scale devices that respond to new ways of living by addressing glare; the need for focused, directional light and adjustability; and advances in efficiency and serial manufacturing. Floor lamps provide light to interior spaces from a fixed location, incorporating modern and innovative materials. Ceiling lamps are focal points of any space, helping to define and break visual planes.

Over the past century, lighting typologies have forged connections between changing domestic and public uses, stylistic and material choices, and technological innovations in bulbs and manufacturing.

The Lightbulb

“The Lightbulb” is integral to functionality in lighting. This section of the exhibition highlights examples in which the bulb is both the light source and an aesthetic element and exposes how the fundamental component has pushed form and function to new levels.

One of the most common lightbulb forms is the bulbous shape, a manifestation of “capturing light in a bottle” — an idea demonstrated in German designer Ingo Maurer’s “Bulb Light” (1966).

Early modernists stripped their designs to the most basic, functional elements, such as in Jean Prouvé’s “Potence d’Eclairage (Swing Jib Lamp) No. 602” (1952). Prouvé reduced the task lamp to a globe bulb that projects a single blob of light to meet a user’s needs.

Works influenced by pop art and the radical design movement in Italy introduced whimsical references. Martine Bedin’s “Super Lamp” (ca. 1978), for the design collective Memphis, resembles a toy car: a rounded base crowned with similarly shaped bulbs in socket collars of different colors, which showcase how lighting can be playful and express a sense of wonder.

Gerrit Rietveld believed interior and exterior spaces were seamlessly connected and created elements that emphasized harmony between planes, color and function. His “Hanging Lamp” (1922) features bulbs suspended from the ceiling in long, vertical and horizontal lines that intersect or bisect yet never actually touch. Gino Sarfatti’s “1063 Floor Lamp” (1954) was one of the earliest manufactured lamps that used a long tube bulb in a minimal composition. Aldo van

den Nieuwelaar's "TC6 Lamp" (1969) takes advantage of the period's new neon tubes, which can be bent into circular or otherwise shaped forms.

Quality of Light

"Quality of Light" considers the manipulation of light effects. Designers have long sought ways to diffuse, reflect, transmit and express light. Over the past century, they have not only created new lighting forms but also explored the physical, transformative and emotionally or psychologically stirring potential of light on its own terms.

One strategy is shifting the focus of direct light through reflection or diffusion using mirrors or reflective surfaces — a tactic that has been around for centuries to expand the reach of candlelight.

Donald Deskey's "Table Lamp" (1928), one of two works in the exhibition from the High's collection, demonstrates the use of diffuser lenses to produce a specific quality of light in a sculptural form, and Zahara Schatz's "Table Lamp, Model T-4-S" (1951) employs a reflector to spread illumination across a surface.

More recently, Toyo Ito combined spun fiberglass with nested globular forms to create a light-filled sculpture for his "Mayuhana Mie Floor Lamp" (2007).

"Electrifying Design" is conceived and co-curated by Cindi Strauss, Sara and Bill Morgan curator of decorative arts, craft, and design at the MFAH and Sarah Schleuning, interim chief curator and Margot B. Perot senior curator of decorative arts and design at the Dallas Museum of Art and former curator of decorative arts and design at the High.

The exhibition is presented on the second level of the High's Anne Cox Chambers Wing.

Related Programs

[Virtual Curator Conversation: Sarah Schleuning and Cindi Strauss](#)

Zoom

August 26, 2021

6 to 7 p.m.

Free for Members (registration required); Not-Yet-Members: \$16.50

Exhibition co-curators Cindi Strauss and Sarah Schleuning will discuss the ideas and planning behind the exhibition and the designers that are included in the show. The conversation will be moderated by Monica Obniski, curator of decorative arts and design at the High.

Exhibition Catalogue

"Electrifying Design: A Century of Lighting" is accompanied by a fully illustrated catalogue published by Yale University Press and the MFAH, with essays by the curators on each of the exhibition's themes, a selected group of field-changing designers, and the role of awards, exhibitions and events where lighting has been championed by the design fields; a timeline of

notable events in the history of lighting; and biographies of international designers and manufacturers.

Exhibition Organization and Support

“Electrifying Design: A Century of Lighting” is organized by the Museum of Fine Arts, Houston. This exhibition is made possible by Premier Exhibition Series Sponsor Delta Air Lines, Inc.; Premier Exhibition Series Supporters Sarah and Jim Kennedy, Dr. Joan H. Weens Estate, and wish foundation; Benefactor Exhibition Series Supporters Anne Cox Chambers Foundation and Robin and Hilton Howell; Ambassador Exhibition Series Supporters The Antinori Foundation, Corporate Environments, Louise Sams and Jerome Grilhot, and Elizabeth and Chris Willett; and Contributing Exhibition Series Supporters Farideh and Al Azadi, Sandra and Dan Baldwin, Lucinda W. Bunnan, Marcia and John Donnell, Helen C. Griffith, Mrs. Fay S. Howell/The Howell Fund, Mr. and Mrs. Baxter Jones, The Arthur R. and Ruth D. Lautz Charitable Foundation, Joel Knox and Joan Marmo, Dr. Joe B. Massey, Margot and Danny McCaul, The Ron and Lisa Brill Family Charitable Trust, Wade Rakes and Nicholas Miller, The Fred and Rita Richman Fund, In Memory of Elizabeth B. Stephens, USI Insurance Services, and Mrs. Harriet H. Warren. Generous support is also provided by the Alfred and Adele Davis Exhibition Endowment Fund, Anne Cox Chambers Exhibition Fund, Barbara Stewart Exhibition Fund, Dorothy Smith Hopkins Exhibition Endowment Fund, Eleanor Mc Donald Storza Exhibition Endowment Fund, The Fay and Barrett Howell Exhibition Fund, Forward Arts Foundation Exhibition Endowment Fund, Helen S. Lanier Endowment Fund, Isobel Anne Fraser–Nancy Fraser Parker Exhibition Endowment Fund, John H. and Wilhelmina D. Harland Exhibition Endowment Fund, Katherine Murphy Riley Special Exhibition Endowment Fund, Margareta Taylor Exhibition Fund, and the RJR Nabisco Exhibition Endowment Fund.

About the High Museum of Art

Located in the heart of Atlanta, the High Museum of Art connects with audiences from across the Southeast and around the world through its distinguished collection, dynamic schedule of special exhibitions and engaging community-focused programs. Housed within facilities designed by Pritzker Prize-winning architects Richard Meier and Renzo Piano, the High features a collection of more than 18,000 works of art, including an extensive anthology of 19th- and 20th-century American fine and decorative arts; major holdings of photography and folk and self-taught work, especially that of artists from the American South; burgeoning collections of modern and contemporary art, including paintings, sculpture, new media and design; a growing collection of African art, with work dating from prehistory through the present; and significant holdings of European paintings and works on paper. The High is dedicated to reflecting the diversity of its communities and offering a variety of exhibitions and educational programs that engage visitors with the world of art, the lives of artists and the creative process. For more information about the High, visit www.high.org.

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