On the Home Front:
Representing Canada at the Triennale di Milano, 1957

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Abstract

In 1957, Canada's National Industrial Design Council (NIDC) organized a display for the Triennale di Milano, an international design exhibition in Milan. This exhibit focused on the development of the "new town" of Kitimat by the Aluminum Company of Canada (Alcan). Along with furnishings and photographs taken of the workers' and guests' quarters were objects that had received NIDC Design Awards. This display was one of many that represented a revitalized Canadian identity to an international audience.

The Second World War had thrust Canada onto the international stage as an autonomous nation. Through its development of social, economic and cultural policies, the nation sought to extricate itself from its old world heritage and differentiate itself from its continental partner. By featuring Canada's "Aluminum City," the NIDC presented Canada as a modern nation that encouraged new industry and technology. Simultaneously, the physical location of Kitimat in the northern half of British Columbia enabled the designers to utilize a traditional element of Canadian identity—the North—in new ways. The landscape was now being civilized through the use of modern design and technology, rather than conquered by force. Finally, the juxtaposition of a photograph of a male Alcan worker, at the front of the display, with domestic objects in the display allowed for a blurring of traditional gender binaries. No longer a hard-hatted, hard-headed industrial worker; he was portrayed as a sophisticated individual working in a modern technological sphere in a civilized community. His presence signalled a rethinking of the contrasts between male and female, producer and consumer, public and private.

Canada's display problematized these polarities and familiar elements of national identity through its use of domestic objects and furniture. My thesis investigates the suitability of blurring these traditional classifications in order to form a visual representation of Canadian identity in the immediate postwar period.
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ACE
On the Home Front: Representing Canada at the Triennale di Milano, 1957

The theme of the Canadian exhibition is set by a tall brilliantly (sic) coloured panel which is at the entrance. On this panel is a large blow-up of a working man in working clothes standing behind a chair of advanced contemporary design. On the seat of the chair is a traditional workman’s lunch bucket.

The first of two rooms, which one enters, will tell the general story of Canadian design and show a cross section of well designed articles of recent manufacture. In addition, Canada is showing paintings, sculpture, ceramic sculpture and enamel work. From this area, one enters directly to the Kitimat room.

The Canadian presentation has been designed in a clean, sharp and dramatic style. The entire wall area is covered with pure white burlap, the structural members are black anodised aluminum and the predominant colours are orange, peacock blue and dark olive green. Although the exhibition is small, it is felt that it will be visually arresting as well as interesting and meaningful to a European audience.¹

Such was the description of Canada’s display at the Triennale di Milano in 1957, according to an undated press release from the National Industrial Design Council (NIDC). This display was one of many that represented postwar Canada to an international audience. Between the end of the Second World War and the summer of 1957 when this display appeared, Canada participated in 172 international exhibitions and fairs as part of a strategy to raise its profile abroad.²

² The 1957 Triennial was open to the public between 27 July and 4 November 1957. Letter from D.W. Buchanan, Industrial Design Division, National Gallery of Canada, to T. Ferraris, dated
Some of these were trade exhibitions meant to re-establish contacts that had been broken by the war; others, like the Triennale, were referred to as “prestige” exhibitions meant to raise the general profile of Canada in an international context. They were part of a government programme that portrayed Canada as an autonomous nation, extricating itself from its old world heritage and differentiating itself from its continental partner.

In this paper, I will investigate the specific example of a display of industrial design objects that was used to promote a unique sense of Canadian national identity on the world stage. This display both represented the ideology of the Canadian government and foreshadowed a reconsideration of gender roles—“the sexual revolution”—in the 1960s. Most literature assumes the 1950s to be a time of rampant consumerism and adherence to a strict gender binary in North America. The assessment of a gendered consumer society is most often based on a narrow recounting of the period—based on heterosexual, white, middle-class America. My intention is to reveal an alternative, contemporary Canadian discourse of the 1950s—one that operates outside the mainstream.

The 1957 Canadian exhibit in Milan, focusing on the development of the “new town” of Kitimat by the Aluminum Company of Canada (Alcan), provided a contestation of mainstream views of society during this period. In its attempt to

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3 “Since our participation in the Triennale is mainly of a prestige nature...” Letter from A.D. Simmons, NIDC to Arthur J. Andrew, Chief, Information Division, Department of External Affairs, dated 8 March 1957, NAC RG 72 Vol. 307 Pt. 2.

portray a sophisticated country with universal access to modern material goods, the NIDC revealed a destabilization of gender stereotypes within a nation that struggled between the politics of socialism and capitalism, and utilized an example of corporate paternalism to do this. Along with furnishings and photographs taken of the workers' and guests' quarters in Kitimat were household furnishings and objects that had received NIDC's Design Awards—including coffee pots and frying pans. The Canadian government's use of domestic objects to represent modern nationhood during the Cold War period was not an isolated case. Signs of domestic comfort became weapons to be used by opposing forces alongside their displays of military arms.

In 1959, the battle for the home front reached its peak when American Vice-President Richard Nixon and Soviet Premier Nikita Khrushchev engaged in what would become one of the most famous verbal sparring matches of the Cold War. Standing in a mock-up of an American kitchen in a model home at the American Exhibition in Moscow, these two politicians debated the strengths of their ideologies based on the qualities of their respective kitchen designs in what came to be known as the "kitchen debate."5 Knowing that the Cold War couldn't be won on destructive military powers alone, Nixon and Khrushchev concentrated their discussion of issues based in the home. Their comments revealed opposing political viewpoints. Khrushchev lauded the quality of Soviet housing construction—saying their buildings would last for decades. Nixon countered by saying that technological innovations were taking place so quickly in America that longevity was not an asset; housing technology was changing too rapidly to

worry about the long life of domestic structures. Nixon continued by adding to the list of well-known American freedoms that included life, liberty and the pursuit of happiness, another one—the right to choose kitchen appliances.

To us, diversity, the right to choose...is the most important thing....We have many different manufacturers and many different kinds of washing machines so that the housewives have a choice.⁶

Khrushchev picked up on Nixon’s separation of the masculine and feminine spheres that pitted the public/constructive/masculine against the private/consumptive/feminine. He countered by saying that the Soviet Union lacked the American “capitalist attitude toward women” that kept women in the kitchen—even if they could use the modern devices represented in the display while they were there. Men and women were expected to work outside the home to contribute to the greater Soviet project. By focusing on the environment behind the walls of the modern home, Nixon had been able to highlight the qualities of life that he thought postwar Americans wanted. But some had questioned the attention paid to the home, and thought that the United States had put too much faith into “femininity and domesticity” rather than the masculine realm of science in 1957 when the Soviets had succeeded in putting its Sputnik satellite into orbit.⁷ Victory through military means remained elusive, but Nixon believed that America could claim victory in the battle for the kitchen.

⁶ May, Homeward Bound: 17.

While this may have been the best-known example of the domestic sphere being used as a public demonstration of nationhood, the Canadian example examined in this thesis predated it. The display presented Canada as a nation that differed from both the capitalist and socialist superpowers. In the immediate postwar period, it struggled to position itself in the world while avoiding ideological extremes. Attempts were made to locate a balance between internationalism and nationalism, the old and the new worlds and capitalism and socialism. In order to look at how the National Industrial Design Council display operated between these polarities, this thesis will explore the political rationale for the new social, economic and cultural policies that were instituted in the 1940s and 50s. It will then examine the way that this small town of Kitimat--its population never exceeded 14,000--fueled the postwar imaginations of the press and government officials. Magazines in Canada and abroad lauded the monumental scale of the engineering project with articles titled “At Kitimat, Men Juggle Geography,” “Kitimat: Colossus of the Northwest,” and “Kitimat--Canada’s Aluminum Titan.”8 The rhetoric surrounding Kitimat’s development reflected Canada’s struggle to concretize its own identity through the enactment of its newly legislated policies. Finally, this examination will focus on Canada’s display at the 1957 Triennale di Milano in order to understand how the choice of Kitimat by agents of the federal government reflected a unique sense of Canadian nationalism--that unwittingly melded private and public activity and questioned gender roles--was acted out on the international stage. Through the use of items of everyday life--like pots and pans--the NIDC represented Canada as a sophisticated, technological and caring nation. Canada’s mid-century

brandishing of the quotidian is particularly timely because the domestic sphere seems to have come under siege again as Canada continues to struggle with the question of its identity during a time of increasing transnationality.
(Re)Constructing Canada

The agency of the Canadian Government responsible for the encouragement of good design is the National Industrial Design Council, operating through the National Gallery of Canada. They give awards to the best designed consumer articles; grant scholarships for study in design; send exhibitions across Canada; and distribute pamphlets and publications on design to manufacturers, retailers and consumers.\(^9\)

One way Canada sought to differentiate itself from other nations after the Second World War was by instituting policies that were intended to build on the independent nation that had “come of age” through its sovereign participation in the war effort. Social, economic and cultural policies provided for a nation-state that continued with many of its historic British values, yet strove to identify itself as a modern and independent. While embodying many traits of its continental partner, Canada developed policies that stressed the common good rather than the individual—as American policies had. This chapter will investigate the evolution of some of those policies.

Many nations were concerned about the social security of their citizens during the Second World War. These concerns were borne out by the signing of the Atlantic Charter; much of the impetus for this agreement was derived from an “internationalization of the New Deal.” The New Deal had been successful in the creation of employment opportunities through public support of projects to

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\(^9\) “Canada at the Triennale,” NAC RG 72 Vol. 307 Pt. 2.
develop or ameliorate the American infrastructure during the Depression years. Although 26 nations signed the *Atlantic Charter* of 1942, most nations diluted its objectives of freer exchange of goods, improved labour standards, economic advancement and social security. Why did Canadians maintain their interest in these provisions, and begin to legislate their institution as other populations began to shift their concerns to the strengthening of the free-enterprise system?

In his essay, “Family Allowances, Old Age Security, and the Construction of Entitlement in the Canadian Welfare State, 1943-1951,” James Struthers presents the construction of the Canadian social safety net as an issue of entitlement or social right rather than an act of charity. He cites Prime Minister William Lyon Mackenzie King’s invocation to Parliament in the summer of 1943: “Charity has become a nauseating thing. The new order is not going to have things done as charity. What is to be done will be done as a matter of right.” This speech reiterated a strategy, begun earlier in the decade, that stressed universal access to the nation’s services by all its citizens rather than the extraordinary support of a few based on their specific need. A year after Mackenzie King’s appeal to

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Parliament, a senior civil servant recalled the popularity of this communitarian approach.

We got to the stage where people began to demand that legislation be written down in specific terms to provide as a matter of right certain benefits to people under clearly defined conditions that were prescribed in the law rather than left to the judgment of some individual. 13

In the throne speech from 1944, Mackenzie King echoed the sentiments of the majority of Canadians when he promised social security “from the cradle to the grave.” 14

There have been differing reasons cited for Canadians’ continued interest in the development of an equitable society. Humphrey Carver, a British-trained architect and urban planner, suggested that the origins of our social concern related to the adversity of our geography and climate.

Because the vast spaces and stern climate made it impossible for people to survive in this land without the aid and support of one another, the essential attitudes of public policy have always had to be compassionate. Confederation was built upon recognition of the disparities that had to be overcome, the recources [sic] that had to


be redistributed, the communications that had to be subsidized, between one region and another and between layers of society. As a microcosm of human society, Canadians discovered from the outset that politics based on power are inevitably destructive and the only ultimate test of public policy is its compassion.\textsuperscript{15}

Carver was one of a number of senior Canadian bureaucrats who embraced the concept of socialist concerns as an integral part of the government’s role—a concept borne out in social, economic and cultural policy. The political concerns they shared with other Canadians most likely impacted on federal policy more than the “stern climate” had. The left held a great deal of influence in federal politics during, and immediately following, the war years. Part of the reason was the popularity of the social democratic Cooperative Commonwealth Federation (CCF), which had been founded in 1932 and is now known as the New Democratic Party. Its popularity was built on a common fear of a postwar economic turmoil similar to the one that had followed the First World War and had not abated until World War II. The end of World War I had been immediately followed by a surge in spending, skyrocketing inflation and then a catastrophic economic crash. Canadians had faced an extended period of shortages of food stuffs, consumer goods and disposable incomes. Debate in Canada during the Second World War was not between the private and public funding of reconstruction—the way it was in the United States, but about the extent of the welfare state. In 1943, 39 per cent of Canadians favoured government ownership of postwar industry.\textsuperscript{16} But, according to the CCF,
revolutionary tactics--leading to a socialist state--were not necessary to bring about change. Government control of individual well-being could be encompassed within the existing Canadian parliamentary framework. In fact, Parliament was able to legislate a system that allowed social services to be provided to all Canadians, such as unemployment insurance (1940), family allowance (1943), and universal hospital insurance (1947).\textsuperscript{17} These programmes were seen as “stigma-free social entitlements” secured in “defence of common citizenship.”\textsuperscript{18} They were costly; the programmes were funded by a three-fold increase in taxes as social welfare expenditures almost quadrupled between 1947 and 1960.\textsuperscript{19} Even though Canadians seemed to be more interested in shared material security than private plenty in the immediate postwar period, the concern for the common good began to be questioned as the economy stabilized. By the mid-1950s, the debate between the values of private and public ownership began to resurface. On Canada’s west coast, a series of advertisements beginning in 1950, sponsored by the British Columbia Federation of Trade and Commerce--an organization of provincial business people--utilized the design and construction of Kitimat as an example of the benefits of private enterprise. In 1950, these advertisements were launched with an enigmatic message about the advantages of life in British Columbia. When this ad appeared, British Columbia was governed by a Liberal-Conservative coalition with the CCF in opposition. The text was couched in language that reiterated messages a moderate provincial

\textsuperscript{17} "At Long Last, Medicare," \textit{Maclean's} 112.26 (1 July 1999): 35. See also Parr, \textit{Domestic Goods}: 31.

\textsuperscript{18} Parr, \textit{Domestic Goods}: 31.

\textsuperscript{19} Ibid.: 22.
government, aware of its vocal socialist opposition, might have used in its quest for social amelioration and development of natural resources.

Do you measure wealth in terms of opportunity? The Canadian system gives the man or woman who is ambitious, talented, hard-working, all the scope anyone could ask, and the rewards to match.20

Although the use of the word “Canadian” may have implied a systemic public programme of freedoms, the advertisement never confirms this. The “Canadian system” was left as an obscure amalgam of programmes and values. Four years later, though, it is no longer the “Canadian system” that is seen as a provider of opportunities for the province’s citizenry, but the public encouragement of private enterprise. It is worth noting that in the intervening years, the Liberal-Conservative government had been replaced by the right-wing Social Credit Party, under the leadership of W.A.C. Bennett.

Nothing but faith in the outlook for British Columbia...and confidence that the people of this province welcome risk capital and will treat it fairly...could explain today’s great Kitimat and Frobisher ventures here.21

After the wartime concern with the development of a strong public sector, the mid-1950s brought a renewed interest in strengthening the economy through the cooperation of the public and private sectors. The conflation of private and

20 “How do you Measure Wealth?,” Western Homes and Living, October/November 1950: 61.

public enterprise in the Federation of Trade and Commerce's ads would be seen again in the construction of Kitimat and its representation in the Triennale display of 1957. Although Kitimat was represented as an evocation of Canadian nationalism, it was also seen as the result of a corporate initiative.

On the economic front, Canada and the United States reflected the radically different approaches that they had taken to wartime manufacturing. Canadian government policy, led by nationalist C.D. Howe, controlled the output of domestic goods during the war and forbade the design of new models—feeling that design and production energies should be applied to the public war effort rather than the private sphere. In the United States, design innovation had been encouraged as a way to cut down on the use of raw materials and therefore boost production numbers—allowing for both domestic and military production. This was thought to allow the American economy to prepare for a high-wage, low-price economy in the postwar years. In contrast, Canadian economists maintained a Keynesian approach meant to temper the anticipated economic volatility of the postwar period and allow for steady, but modest, growth. According to economist John Maynard Keynes, governments should borrow to spend their way through economic downturns. This spending was meant to "kick start" the economy by creating a need for primary materials as well as providing workers with incomes that could be spent on consumables. Consumer spending would lead to increases in corporate manufacturing that would ultimately bring in tax dollars to pay down the debts incurred by the government in order to begin this whole process. Keynesian economics had been utilized in the United States as part of Roosevelt's "New Deal"—particularly in regard to the actions of the Tennessee Valley Authority, but was seen by Americans to be
necessary only in times of severe depression, like the one that followed the crash of 1929. In anticipation of a postwar period of economic strengthening, American economists left behind the New Deal’s interventionism in favour of a free market approach, whereas the Canadians sought to maintain economic controls. Furthermore, it was not clear to economists whether the size of the Canadian market would allow for a viable mass-production economy that formed the American precedent. The battle between those promoting a high-production/low-wage economic model and those espousing its low-production/high-wage opponent was pervasive in Canada by the end of the war. In fact, it was so widely discussed that it was not only fought in government offices of policy-makers in Ottawa, but also in the galleries of two mainstream museums in Toronto in 1945.22

Joy Parr, in her recent book, Domestic Goods, recounts the story of two exhibitions—one held at the Royal Ontario Museum (ROM), the other at the then Toronto Art Gallery (now the Art Gallery of Ontario)—that embodied these two conflicting approaches. Design in Industry at the ROM, co-sponsored by Eaton’s department store and the Canadian Handicrafts Guild, highlighted the small-scale production of high-quality goods. Naturally, due to the involvement of the Handicrafts Guild, the design of these high-quality goods would be governed by craft—by the handmade. In an earlier critique of this approach, Humphrey Carver had claimed that workshop production isolated “itself from the vigorous real world,” but that there could be a “virile” role for the crafts in the new industrial world through the adaptation of craft to the machine.23 The use of

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terms such as "vigorous" and "virile" are indicative of contemporary artistic concerns about the heroic role of the (usually male) artist or designer. Mass, machine-production, unlike the workshop production that Carver had criticized, was the focus of the second exhibition, *Design in the Household*.

The curators of this exhibition at the Toronto Art Gallery borrowed a conceptual model from the Museum of Modern Art's department of architecture and design concerning the importance of industrial design on mass production. In fact, they borrowed more than a conceptual model; MoMA loaned the Toronto Art Gallery a series of didactic panels that highlighted the international modernist tenet that material, form and function were inextricably entwined. Rows of consumer products—most made in Canada—were lined up against the walls of the gallery as they would have been in a department store. Unprecedented numbers of visitors saw both this exhibition and the one at the ROM.  

Part of the reason for their interest may have been due to the scarcity of readily available consumer products in the nation's retail outlets because of the government's wartime economic tactics. Refrigerators were almost as rare in Canada during these early postwar years as the Old Masters paintings or Egyptian mummies in the adjacent galleries.

The scarcity of consumer durables and minimal standards of housing were to be short-lived. But Canadians did not mirror their American counterparts' quest for consumables; they entered into different markets, and entered those markets

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later than American shoppers. By the middle of the 1950s, a survey showed that Canadians were no longer happy with housing that “in many cases [was] little bigger or better than wartime housing,” nor were they satisfied to do without the modern appliances that were being advertised in lifestyle magazines. Almost 80% of the readers polled by Western Homes and Living magazine in 1956 wanted houses with three or more bedrooms; 85% preferred to live in a house with a basement—meaning that they could utilize this extra space, most likely for the recreation rooms that were wanted by the same percentage of their readers. Almost two-thirds of the readership felt that they needed a two-car enclosure, preferably a garage. Similar numbers listed automatic washers and dryers among their expectations; almost half included freezers. The survey also showed that although the majority of those polled wanted “contemporary” houses, few wanted them to be “progressive contemporary.” The term “contemporary” had been coined to describe buildings (and objects) that were a modified version of modernism; it was developed as an optimistic and forward-looking style that catered to popular taste. The “progressive contemporary” designation indicated

Parr, “Domesticating Objects,” Domestic Goods: 165-195. Parr notes that Canadian women took much longer than Americans to purchase automatic washers. She suggests that this was due to outdated technology used by public utilities and the still-extensive use of wells in rural regions that led to problems with low water pressure that rendered automatic washers useless; hesitation on the part of Canadian women in the postwar period to invest in new technology due to its expense and their experiences of financial difficulty in the interwar years; and a work ethic that maintained the benefits of, and pride in, hard work.

“What Westerners Want in a Home,” Western Homes and Living December/January 1956-1957: 12-16. According to the survey, 39.8% wanted 3 bedrooms, 22.1% wanted 3 plus provision for additional space, 14.9% wanted 4, and 2.8% wanted more. 59.8% preferred full basements, 24.7% partial, and 15.5% no basement. 62.5% preferred a separate recreation room, 25.7% a “family” room adjoining the living room, and only 11.8% no separate recreation area. 35% wanted space for one car, 65% space for two; 40.1% preferred an open carport, 59.9% wanted it enclosed. 77.5% expected to have an automatic washer, 68.9% an automatic dryer, and 42.2% a deep freeze. Housing styles were chosen from a series of illustrations, and the results distilled to: 44% chose contemporary designs, 27.2% “progressive modern,” 17.4% contemporary split-level, and 11.4% traditional.
a closer affiliation with the aesthetics of Bauhausian modernism, characterized by strong colours and harsh lines. The preference for a modified version of the modern style would play an important role in the story of modern design in Canada along with the history of the National Industrial Design Council and the designs for housing in Kitimat.

The establishment of the Council was part of conscientious decision by the Canadian government to support cultural endeavours as a way of reinforcing public displays of nationhood. Canadian cultural policies were dominated by the influence of the report of the Royal Commission on National Development in the Arts, Letters and Sciences, better known then as the Massey Commission, that had inquired about the place of culture in contemporary Canadian society between 1949 and 1951. The recommendations of this commission led to the establishment of institutions such as the National Library and The Canada Council for the Arts. One section of the chapter on “The Artist and the Writer” dealt with architecture and town planning. The commission reported that although mass production had “tended to wipe out regional characteristics which would otherwise have had an opportunity to develop,” there were “many hopeful signs of a growing architectural sense in Canada.” The commission particularly noted that “the new ‘engineering architecture’ symbolized in Canada chiefly by grain elevators” were the source of much optimism about Canada’s


28 The 1944 Curtis Report, of the Federal Advisory Committee on Reconstruction and Re-establishment, set the groundwork for the establishment of postwar cultural policies. See Liscombe, The New Spirit: 62.

Unlike architecture and planning, craft did not form part of the original mandate of the commission--other than crafts' exhibition at either the National Gallery or the National Museum (now the Canadian Museum of Civilization). However, the Commission did include a chapter on "handicrafts" in its final report. It was completely assured that handicrafts were an important activity for the nation's citizens. However, the commission's recommendations for the crafts community--as distinct from architecture--left it in an ambiguous situation because they saw crafts as part of the private realm rather than the public. It was the public realm they recommended funding, not private activities like craft. The commissioners concluded that the "formal encouragement of handicrafts is a responsibility of the provinces and of the various voluntary organizations"—particularly the Canadian Handicrafts Guild, an outgrowth of the Women's Art Association. The Guild had been incorporated in Montreal in 1906 and had (at this time) provincial branches in Alberta, Manitoba, Ontario, Quebec and the Northwest Territories. Hand production was destined to remain in the private realm of the feminine while other art forms received public support. By highlighting the machine-made in the report on architecture and devolving the responsibility for craft to charitable organizations run by volunteer women, the commission contradicted its lament of individual production and


31. Canadians have always struggled with the place of craft. Although the National Gallery of Canada produced exhibitions of craft in the late 1950s, the Canadian Museum of Civilization is now the home of the nation's craft collection. Part of the reason for this difficulty is the perception of craft as part of the legacy of Victorian, private, feminine production.


33. Ibid.: 237.
regional styles. The commissioners' recommendations, like the choices made for the exhibition at the Toronto Art Gallery, revealed a dialogue between those espousing the mass-produced object that inhabited the public realm and those supporting the one-of-a-kind work produced in the private domain. The support of activities in the public sphere over those of the private would be repeated by those involved in the selection of items for the Triennale di Milano.

The National Industrial Design Council's favouring of a minimal, machine-made aesthetic reflected a recent Anglo-Canadian heritage of ideas. In the years immediately after the Second World War, Donald Buchanan, who then worked with the National Film Board of Canada, attempted to get British art historian Herbert Read to address the annual convention of the Canadian Manufacturers' Association. Although Read was not able to attend, he did send a brief entitled *The Future of Design in Canada* to Buchanan. According to the late Peter Day, Read suggested that Canada should establish a design council based on the model of the Council of Industrial Design in Britain. In time, Read's recommendation was accepted. Buchanan headed up the new Industrial Design Information Division of the National Gallery of Canada, founded in June 1947; a year later this division became the National Industrial Design Committee, and then in June 1953 the National Industrial Design Council. Both the NIDC and its British counterpart followed Read's campaign to rid industrial design of its "handicraft methods of production." The modern industrial notion of "design"


35 See record of House of Commons debate of 1 May 1961 in NAC RG 20 Vol. 998 Pt. 7. See also Day, "The Future that Can be Ours": 134-5.

had been constructed in opposition to the Victorian emphasis on the handmade craft object. Read saw the world as entering a new phase in its history; a phase when new materials and technologies would be utilized in the service of social and economic reorganization for the public good. Modernism's chief objective was the provision of design excellence—and with it access to advanced technology—to as many as possible. His campaign, like the legislative campaign undertaken by the Canadian government in the 1940s and 50s to provide universal social programmes, was an attempt to provide access to a more equitable standard of living by all its citizens. According to Read, the use of "good design" by industry allowed the masses to purchase items that previously had only been available to the rich. 37 Along with exhibitions at the Design Centre in Ottawa, the NIDC was also responsible for the assembly of the Design Index—a catalogue of "well-designed" objects available for sale in Canada as well as for the administration of design competitions meant to encourage corporations to hire industrial designers to assist in the development of new products for the postwar consumer society. But the well-designed objects promoted by the Council would always be a minority concern—a concern for specific social and economic interests. Both the Canadian buying public and manufacturers would question the minimalist aesthetics promoted by the NIDC as the economy strengthened and the prospect of freer trade diminished.

Although the immediate postwar period is most often portrayed as a time of rampant consumerism and "Happy Days" naiveté, this was a time of greater complexity. For most Canadians, it began with a period of caution—a fear that

37 Ibid.: 53.
the economic boom of the war years would be eclipsed by an economic slowdown followed by a crash similar to that of the 1929. The Canadian government, fearful of the popular support of the left-wing CCF, continued to develop a social safety net that would guarantee access to life's basic needs. Canadians were willing to live simply—in smaller houses, with fewer “modern” appliances, and paying higher taxes in order to support programmes that provided a “stigma-free social entitlement” to all its citizens. But as the decade progressed, citizens became more self-assured and looked forward to higher standards of living. While social security was still a major concern, Canadians were interested also in increasing their material comfort and wealth. Homes became larger with greater differentiation of living spaces; furnishings softened their hard, modern lines. Economic policy reflected this ideological shift from public to private enterprise. It was private enterprise that encouraged a high-production, low-wage model of production. This model had been used successfully by American industry, whereas other countries like Sweden and Denmark had chosen to develop a low-production, high-wage model—like the one promoted by the Royal Ontario Museum and the Canadian Handicrafts Guild. The high-production model reiterated the need for industrial designers to “strengthen” the design of objects rather than follow a femininized craft aesthetic. Herbert Read’s text *Art and Industry* was the basis for this industrial model, and it formed the basis for the founding of Canada’s federal design authority, the National Industrial Design Council. The change in ideology from a caring society that accommodated basic needs to a more rugged and

38 For more about these changes—particularly concerning the division of space between children and adults, see Susan James, “The Master Bedroom Comes of Age: Gender, Sexuality and the CMHC Competition Series,” *Society for the Study of Architecture in Canada Bulletin* 20.4 (December 1995): 104-111.
individualized one was simultaneously incorporated and ignored by the display of workers' and guest housing at Kitimat.
Kitimat: Tomorrow's City Today

The city of Kitimat is virtually in a wilderness—42 miles by rail to the nearest town and [500] miles from Vancouver, the nearest city of any size. The Aluminum Company of Canada is the town's largest taxpayer and employer.39

In Canada's endeavour to portray itself as part of the modern, postwar world, it sought ways of building on the strengths of its natural resources. No longer content to see itself as a land of "hewers of wood," it looked for examples of the intersection of nature and technology. Kitimat provided the NIDC with an example of technology's cohabitation with nature in Canada's north. The history of the design and construction of Kitimat, and its portrayal in the Canadian and American media, helps us to understand why Kitimat was chosen to be the subject for the National Industrial Design Council's display at the 1957 Triennale di Milano.

In 1959, *Canadian Geographic Journal* presented Kitimat as the embodiment of the future of Canada—as "Tomorrow's City Today."40 Kitimat is situated on the northern Pacific coast of British Columbia. The decision by the Aluminum Company of Canada to locate here resulted from the availability of abundant hydroelectric power if the nearby Nechako River was dammed.41 The damming

39 From copy for didactic panel in the Canadian display at 1957 Triennale di Milano, "Milan--2nd section--right wall," NAC RG 72 Vol. 307 Pt. 2.


of this river has had considerable effects on the ecology of the surrounding area. This ecological component, as well as the displacement of Native communities caused by this development, warrants further study.42

Although the company had investigated the area from 1928 to 1931 and again from 1937 to 1939, it was only after the Second World War that an agreement was reached by the company and the government of British Columbia to cede ownership of the provincially held land to the company.43 It was fitting that the west coast of Canada had been chosen by Alcan after the war, rather than expanding the Quebec-based operations that it had built in the earlier years of the century. British Columbia served the Canadian imagination in a similar fashion as California did for Americans. Unbridled by the weight of European-based histories, the west coast was seen as holding the future of both nations. In fact, Lakewood—a recently built, mixed development community in the Los Angeles area of California—adopted the motto “Lakewood—Tomorrow’s City Today” (the same phrase as was used in Canadian Geographic Journal) in 1954 to describe its comprehensive development of housing, schools and stores. Lakewood had been built around two aircraft plants, North American and

42 For more information about ecological and human displacement, see Super-Companies, directed by Boyce Richardson, National Film Board of Canada, 1987. See also “Foresters Demand B.C.-Alcan Project Be Cleared Before Flooding,” Forest and Outdoors 47.11 (November 1951): 17 and “Alcan Answers 11 Vital Questions on the Kitimat Forestry Problem,” ibid. 48.12 (December 1952): 8, 9 and 12.

43 According to Stanley Rough, “In 1928, Provincial Government surveyors reported that it was possible to divert the waters of a chain of lakes (the headwaters of the Nechako River) to sea level in several places, if tunnels were drilled through mountains.” Stanley Rough, Time and Place: Stories of Northern British Columbia, Prince Rupert: Daily News, 1958: 41. See also John Kendrick, People of the Snow: The Story of Kitimat. Toronto: NC Press, 1987.
Douglas. Kitimat, on the other hand, was built to produce one of the raw materials used not only for these planes but also for domestic goods.44

Along with plastics and moulded plywood, aluminum was one of the materials that attracted the attention of industrial designers and the public in the postwar period. The technology to produce this lightweight metal was discovered at the end of the 19th century, but widespread use of the material did not come about until the Second World War when it was used extensively for manufacturing airplanes and bomb parts.45 The aluminum industry was so important to the military effort that Canadian troops occupied an Alcan plant in Quebec during 1941 to maintain production when the plant was hit by a wild-cat strike.46 By 1945, designers and manufacturers looked for new ways to use the plastic, plywood and aluminum technologies that factories had employed during the war. The lure of this modern technology was so strong that Donald Buchanan, in one of his dual roles as co-editor of Canadian Art magazine, suggested that his readers of visit the National Research Council's scientific laboratories in Ottawa to see the “moulded sculptures of plywood” and the “beauties of plastic and aluminum.”47 Aluminum's aeronautical heritage was represented in a 1946 exhibition at the National Gallery of Canada entitled Design in Industry. (This was a different exhibition than the same-named one discussed earlier, and held


46 Super-Companies.

at the Royal Ontario Museum in 1945.) In this exhibition, household objects made of aluminum were exhibited alongside an aircraft propeller that had been made at Alcan’s wartime factory in Kingston.48 Later, domestic goods were represented without this literal connection to aircraft technology; however, the material itself maintained its allusions to air—and later space—travel and the ideology of an optimistic, modern future. In the April 1949 issue of Canadian Homes and Gardens, the editors presented readers with an aluminum house in a feature article entitled “It’s not Done with Mirrors...It’s Aluminum.” Designed in conjunction with Alcan and the Central Mortgage and Housing Corporation, the house was as much a showcase for modern nationhood as it was an exhibition of new uses for aluminum. These new uses—including garage doors, windows, and siding—became popular in the 1950s and 60s.

*Canadian Homes and Gardens* hopes you’ll like the Aluminum House featured this month. It represents another step forward in construction progress. It demonstrates how that amazingly strong, light and durable metal, aluminum, can be used to help Canadians get the maximum value for their home-building dollars. And their furnishing dollars, too.49

The rhetoric surrounding the house proved to be more interesting that the structure itself. According to the editors of the magazine, aluminum had been chosen because it was a “Canadian material possessing many unique advantages.”50 National pride was evoked as a way of legitimizing the use of a

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49 “It’s not Done with Mirrors...It’s Aluminum,” *Canadian Homes and Gardens* 26.4 (April 1949): 21.

50 Ibid.: 22.
material that Canadians may have been aware of for its military and industrial applications, but were unfamiliar with its use as a domestic building material. Although it was insulated and sheathed with aluminum and had aluminum windows, it was still a wood-framed construction that resembled many of the houses that were being built in suburbs across the country to meet the postwar demand for housing. The use of aluminum was not intended to portray an advanced architectural aesthetic; instead the magazine’s editors wanted something that utilized new materials, but looked familiar. According to the article, the house’s architects were instructed that “[i]ts design must rival brick, block or clapboard in charm.”

Exhibitions like Design in Industry and articles such as the one featuring the aluminum house weren’t the only way that aluminum was promoted as a modern material. In 1952, the NIDC announced an industrial design competition that was meant to encourage the use of wood and aluminum in new product design. The emphasis on design in wood and aluminum symbolized the traditional bounty of Canada’s natural resources along with the growing availability of modern materials and technology. The design competition was supported with prize money from the National Gallery of Canada, the Canadian Lumbermen’s Association and Alcan.

A report signed by Donald Buchanan, in his role as secretary of the National Industrial Design Committee, foreshadowed the partnership between the private and public sectors that would produce the exhibit in Milan.

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51 Ibid.: 25.

Our members consider this competition our most important venture to date. This is because we now have conclusively demonstrated that industry in Canada is willing to share with Government the cost of promotional activities directed towards furthering better design of Canadian products.\footnote{53 Untitled report by Donald W. Buchanan, NAC RG20 Vol. 997 File 13-2 Pt.1.}

Unfortunately, it seemed that designers in Canada had yet to meet the challenge of designing with this new metal. The judges, who included Toronto architect John B. Parkin, Alcan’s J.S. Luck and American designer George Nelson, awarded all of the prizes in the wood design categories, but none for designs in aluminum.\footnote{54 The other two judges were Lt.-Col. G. Allan Burton from Simpson’s and Prof. E.A. Allcutt from the University of Toronto’s School of Engineering, NAC RG 20 Vol. 997 Pt. 2.} Although the judges remarked that Canadian design was “looking up,” designers were faring better with traditional materials, like wood and wrought iron, than they were with the plastics and aluminum that Buchanan had lauded in his article about the National Research Council.

Much of the promotion of the use of aluminum in Canadian industrial design was undertaken, or supported, by Alcan--particularly through its Aluminum Laboratories operation in Kingston. Alcan had been formed in 1928 with headquarters in Montreal. It was a subsidiary of Aluminium Limited, a company that controlled 47 companies located in 20 countries.\footnote{55 Kitimat-Kemano: Five Years of Operation: 1954-1959, Vancouver: Aluminum Company of Canada, 1959: 2. Alcan’s parent company, also created in 1928 was Aluminium Limited. Aluminium Limited was set up as a parallel company to Alcoa and consisted of all of Alcoa’s former international assets. As the extra “{i}” indicates, most of these assets were in countries that had been part of the British Empire e.g. Aljam was the Jamaica-based provider of bauxite. See Kendrick, People of the Snow, Toronto: NC Press, 1987: 28.} Its predecessor, the Aluminum Company of America (Alcoa) had developed a town named Arvida.
in Quebec, beginning in 1924. The decision to create this town in the Saguenay region was based on the availability of massive amounts of hydroelectricity at low cost. The Quebec government saw Arvida as a way increasing and diversifying its economic base. Concessions were made by the provincial government to allow for the purchase of electricity at below-market prices. Arvida, named after Alcoa president Arthur Vining Davis, never had a “master-plan” the way that Kitimat did. Although Edmond Eberts, its Vice-President in charge of Properties, claimed otherwise, initially the City of Arvida met most of the criteria for a “company town.” Alcan owned all of the land within the municipal boundaries, and built the streets, commercial services, schools and commercial blocks. Later, the company’s hold on the town loosened, and in 1954 most of the houses in town were sold to their residents—Alcan workers and their families. By the time Alcan made this decision, the conceptualization, design and construction of Kitimat was well underway.

The British Columbia government was as interested in diversifying its economic base at the end of the Second World War as Quebec had been in the interwar years. The location chosen was about 650 kilometres northwest of Vancouver at the head of the Kitimat Arm of the Douglas Channel. This fjord-like body of water provided a sheltered, deep-sea harbour. Prior to the arrival of European


settlers, Haisla Natives had a summer village on the east shore of Kitimat Arm and winter accommodation three kilometres up the Kitimat River. Alcan developed the smelter plant and infrastructure for the townsite, but hired private contractors to develop the residential areas. The language used to describe this engineering feat was as grandiose as the project itself. B.J. McGuire wrote about the project in the *Canadian Geographic Journal*.

**Breath-taking in scope, the west-coast operation visualizes a project in which huge dams will restrain the eastward flow of the Nechako River which drains a chain of lakes in the tableland area of Tweedsmuir National Park.**

In order to provide the electricity that would be consumed by the smelter, Alcan engineers developed a plan whereby a 225 kilometre long reservoir was created by building the Kenney Dam—which was then the largest rock-filled dam in the world—across the Nechako River and diverting its flow from east to west. From this reservoir, the water plunged down a 16-kilometre long tunnel to a powerhouse located inside of Mount DuBose--named after McNeely DuBose, President of Alcan during the construction period. This immense underground powerhouse, measuring 25 metres wide, 40 metres high and 200 metres long, was connected to the outside world by an eight-metre wide tunnel that was three-quarter of a kilometre in length. From the powerhouse in Kemano, a 75-

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59 *Profile 1992, Kitimat: District of Kitimat, 1992: 1. Kitamaat Village is still located at the summer village site, on the east shore of Kitimat Arm.


61 It should also be noted that the Kenney Dam was named after the British Columbia Minister of Lands and Forests who negotiated the transfer of lands to Alcan. See Kendrick, *People of the Snow*: 45-7.
kilometre long transmission line, including 309 towers, snaked its way over the mountains to Kitimat and Alcan's smelter. In an illustration from Life magazine, dated 23 August 1954, three linemen string the power lines that carried essential hydroelectricity from the power house in Kemano to the smelter. The three men in the photograph literally tower over the natural landscape—adding an element of civilization to the vast, natural area. In the New York Times Magazine of 10 November 1957, a similar view of nature under the surveillance of "man" allies this control of the environment with the formation of an idea of what the Times called "Canadianism," or Canadian nationalism. The idea of north, as Glenn Gould spoke of in his 1967 radio programme of the same name, was a concept that had long been a constituent of national identity in Canada. But the Canadian north was replete with its own contradictions. Although it held the imagination of many Canadians, it was seldom visible to them—due to the fact that most Canadians lived, and still do live, in a narrow strip of land that hugs the American border. Even though it may have been physically elusive, the north was seen as liberating. According to a Canadian Youth Commission report of 1948, it was "[t]he snows, the winds, the spaces, the woods and rocks of Canada, [that] have made the Canadian family." The Commission's statement recalled Humphrey Carver's claim that our northern geography and climate led to the development of a social system based on interdependence. Kitimat's physical placement in the northern half of British Columbia enabled it to embody

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64 Youth, Marriage and Family, Toronto: Canadian Youth Commission, 1948: 1, cited in Doug Owram, Born at the Right Time: 45.
this conceptually important, yet virtually unexperienced, notion of Canadian northern-ness. But Kitimat embodied more than a sense of the north; it was also part of a continuum of modern town planning that strove to accommodate workers and their families.

The plan for Kitimat was commissioned by Alcan to provide the best possible modern community for its workers. According to one of the planners, "[t]he workers must find Kitimat more than temporarily acceptable. They must be enthusiastic about it as a particularly fine place in which to live and bring up their families." They hired Clarence Stein, an American planner who had developed new towns in the United States, and the firm of Mayer and Whittlesey with Milton Glass. Unlike other articles that focused on the place of Kitimat within Canada's north, such as the one from the New York Times Magazine, the international nature of the design for Kitimat was emphasized in title of an article in Architectural Forum," dated October 1954 by planner Julian Whittlesey: "Industry builds Kitimat--America's 'new town' prototype." It was to Whittlesey's advantage to portray the development of the Kitimat plan as part of his firm's larger project to create a series of new, satellite cities--primarily in the United States--in an article in an American-based, and read, architectural journal. Kitimat was seen by a variety of interests as representative of their modern concerns. The scale of the project, its placement in northern British Columbia and the use of modern technology and materials garnered a small town print

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coverage in such mass media publications as *Life*, *Harper’s*, and *National Geographic* along with specialized journals such as *Architectural Forum*.\(^{66}\)

The planning for Kitimat incorporated concepts borrowed from the garden city, Radburn, greenbelt city and neighbourhood unit concepts.\(^{67}\) Stein had gained notoriety with his participation in the planning of Radburn, New Jersey in 1926.\(^{68}\) Nearing the end of his career, Kitimat would prove to be Stein's last large-scale project. Because he had given up his planning office, he was engaged as "Co-Ordinator of Planning,"\(^{69}\) the firm of Mayer and Whittlesey did the physical planning of the community. Proposals for garden cities were promoted in England by industrialist Ebenezer Howard. At the turn of the century, Howard developed an alternative to industrial urbanity that combined the best features of the city and countryside. Populations of garden cities were to be large enough to support institutions such as hospitals, libraries and concert halls, while their densities were kept low enough to maintain contact with nature. In 1903, architects Barry Parker and Richard Unwin gave Howard's concepts physical form in the construction of Letchworth. Letchworth was organized as "a group

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\(^{68}\) For more about Clarence Stein, see *The Writings of Clarence Stein, Architect of the Planned Community*, Ed. Kermit Carlyle Parsons, Baltimore and London: Johns Hopkins, 1998 and Kermit Carlyle Parsons, "Clarence Stein's Variations on the Garden City Theme by Ebenezer Howard," *Journal of the American Planning Association* 64.2 (Spring 1988): 129-130.

of connected villages around a civic centre with a factory on the outskirts.” The plan for Kitimat reflected this separation of industrial and residential areas by locating the service centre—incorporating the smelter and related businesses—to the west of the Kitimat River, and residential, recreational and retail areas to the east. Furthermore, Kitimat was designed to comprise ten neighbourhoods when it was competed. Howard also had identified a maximum size for each garden city; further expansion would be into a separate community nearby. In Kitimat’s case, this would have been a satellite community in the Kitimat Valley. Radburn had been dubbed the “town for the motor age” because it introduced a plan that separated pedestrian from vehicular traffic and directed through traffic away from local activities. The Radburn plan’s influence was demonstrated by a series of walkways which allowed young students to walk from their homes to neighbourhood elementary schools and residents to walk to local stores and recreational facilities without crossing major roadways. Most residential streets were designed as loops or cul-de-sacs that carried little traffic. The greenbelt concept stressed that communities should be preplanned for a maximum number of inhabitants; and, to avoid urban sprawl, an area of undeveloped land would surround the city. In Kitimat, the ring of natural vegetation along the perimeter of the city was made visible by including “woodland character roads” passing through them. The town was designed to accommodate up to 50,000 residents, and plans were made to construct the entire community in stages. As important


for the greenbelt concept was the inclusion of central green space. In Kitimat, this takes the form of green spaces that carry the pedestrian walkways. Houses were planned back-to-front, so that the rear entrances were from the street and the front faced the communal space. While residents still make use of these walkways, Stein's plan to subordinate the street front did not last. Today, the automobile entrance marks the front of the house, while the pathways are located in the backyards. (Stein's planning did not take the contemporary primacy of the automobile--and the proliferation of multi-car families--into consideration.) The central location of stores and elementary schools was also part of the neighbourhood unit concept. According to the "Master Plan Report" prepared for Alcan by Mayer and Whittlesey:

All the planning of Kitimat is based on the superblock of 100 acres or over....The super-block simply means an area with adequate internal circulation, but not pierced by through-roads...Each neighbourhood is 200 acres or over, with one road through it (i.e. two super-blocks)...Each neighbourhood contains its own built-in parks, schools, health centers and local shopping and recreation facilities. Internal walks and cycle paths give very direct access to these facilities.73

Kitimat never reached its optimal population projected in Mayer and Whittlesey's plans. This shortfall has affected the town detrimentally--particularly its "city centre," and ultimately has led to the closing of stores such as the Hudson's Bay Company because of the small consumer base.

Like the discussions about Arvida, there was a long debate about Kitimat’s status as a “company town.” Although Alcan refused this moniker, University of British Columbia professor Peter Oberlander and landscape architect Cornelia Oberlander stated in 1956 that: “[i]t seems somewhat overconfident to believe that a fully democratic or ‘free market’ community can be created literally overnight, when the only and all-pervasive reason for its existence is one employer.” In the “Master Plan Report,” housing accommodation was provided for families and “single workers,” not “single people.” There was no space allocated for single individuals who were not associated with the company. Even though a freely elected town council was established before most of the town was occupied--or even built, it would have been difficult--if not impossible--to legislate in opposition to the wishes of the town’s major taxpayer and employer. Today, two other corporations have established operations in Kitimat--Eurocan Pulp and Paper and Methanex Petroleum. Still, Alcan’s presence dominates the town.

In The New Spirit: Modern Architecture in Vancouver, 1938-1963, Rhodri Windsor Liscombe cites a letter that Frederick Lasserre, director of the University of British Columbia’s School of Architecture, sent to John S. Kendrick, assistant project manager. Lasserre included a proposal by two Vancouver planners that “concentrated upon provision of community facilities, proper relationship to site,


75 “Kitimat, B.C. Master Plan Report”: Appendix VII.
high design standards for all elements and the use of new technologies.”

Although Kendrick replied that Kitimat would be an “example of advanced thinking in living and social environment,” the houses lacked the minimal modernist aesthetic that was exhibited in several of the public buildings—including the original section of the city centre shopping area. Private contractors built the housing stock from uninspired designs and, like the designers of the aluminum house in Canadian Homes and Gardens, utilized mainstream construction technologies. Very little rental accommodation was provided. Single-family dwellings, “twin houses,” and “group houses” (duplex and row housing) were built along with a small number of two- and three-storey apartment buildings. The paucity of rental accommodation, coupled with company-held second mortgages, prompted workers to purchase their own homes rather than rent. It was meant to encourage married workers to settle in Kitimat, and allow Alcan to avoid the high, and costly, turnover of labourers. Kitimat had been planned to accommodate the nuclear family represented in 1950s television sitcoms, not the single men who had built the town.

The nuclear families of Kitimat barely appeared in the display in Milan. The press and designers of the exhibit had been attracted to Kitimat because of the heroic efforts made in its construction, not because of its suburban lifestyle (even

76 University of British Columbia Special Collections, Thompson, Berwick and Pratt Archives Box 51 File 7, cited in Liscombe, The New Spirit: 66.

77 Ibid.: 66-67. The population of Kitimat stabilized at approximately 13,000, less than one-third of number planned by Stein and Mayer and Whittlesey. This shortfall in population made the plan for the City Centre untenable. Modernist Vancouver architectural firms such as Sharp, Thompson, Berwick and Pratt and Semmens Simpson had been hired to design public buildings in Kitimat, yet the housing design was dictated by commercial, rather than aesthetic, concerns. In the end, financial considerations overtook aesthetics. See Liscombe, New Spirit: 66.
though the lifestyle was enacted 650 kilometres from the nearest urban centre, so it wasn’t actually *sub-urban*). It was one of these hardy construction workers that was represented in the display surrounded by the accoutrements of sophisticated modern living. The families were replaced by the linemen—perched on the aluminum towers that brought the only indigenous raw material to Kitimat—who had appeared in *Life* magazine in 1954. The worker was juxtaposed with aluminum domestic goods in a similar fashion to the propeller that was displayed with housewares in the National Gallery’s *Design in Industry* exhibition in 1946. His accommodation was depicted as a beacon of modernism on Canada’s northern frontier. Unfortunately, the will to incorporate this modernism into the residential areas of Kitimat was subsumed by the commercial concerns of the developers, so that the streets of Kitimat were filled with the unthreatening “contemporary” styled houses that had been preferred by the readers of *Western Homes and Living* rather than more progressive designs. Lasserre’s vision of an aesthetically and technologically innovative community was replaced by a stereotypical postwar suburb. Yet the designers of the display in Milan chose not to look at suburban, family-oriented Kitimat of 1957, but instead chose to focus on an image of homosocial, male environment of its construction.
Designing the Nation

The theme of Canada’s presentation is the increasing awareness of good design expressed in her manufactured products. The point emphasized is that this is not only evident in the urban centres, but also in the outlying regions. The new aluminum-producing centre of Kitimat in the Canadian Rocky Mountains is used as an example.⁷⁸

The attention accorded the design and construction of Kitimat in the Canadian and international press made it an understandable choice as the focus of Canada’s display at the 1957 Triennale di Milano. Here was a project that combined the tradition of Canada’s profundity of natural resources with the modernity of technology, and did this in one of the nation’s “outlying regions.” The juxtaposition of domestic objects, images and text questioned commonly accepted gender binaries. Notions of “private” and “public” spheres are contested throughout the display—in both the problematization of gender roles and the conflation of corporate and governmental concerns in the creation of a caring society.

The Milan design triennials were instituted in the 1920s to present architecture, decorative and industrial arts.⁷⁹ Canada’s decision to participate in these exhibitions did not come easily. After receiving an invitation from the fair’s organizers in 1951, the Canadian trade secretary in Rome was less than enthusiastic about Canada’s participation—in part because of the lack of

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⁷⁸ “Canada at the Triennale,” NAC RG 72 Vol. 307 Pt. 2.

preparation time and expense, but also because of his perception of the shortcomings of Canadian design.

Since the possibility of our competing in Italy in industrial design or in the decorative and industrial arts would be remote, even at best, and under present conditions would be almost impossible, I cannot see that we need to give this matter any further thought.80

The trade secretary, like many others, doubted that Canadian design could compete in Milan, a city that had become a design centre in Europe after the war.81 Three years later, Canada did participate in the tenth Triennale. This display was reconstructed for the “Homes of Tomorrow” section of the Salon des Arts Menagers in Paris in 1955, and later some of its furnishings went on to be shown at the Musée des arts décoratifs in Belgium.82 The display consisted of two rooms—one, a living-dining room; the other, a kitchen. A separate outdoor space was also included as a way of representing the familiar Canadian trope of nature. The two rooms were meant to represent the design possibilities for the average accommodation of Canada’s newly formed families. In his address to the Italian press, Canadian Ambassador Pierre Dupuy described the concept.

Today in Canada, hundreds of thousands of new, small homes and flats for families of average income are being built. One noticeable


81 See Sparke, Italian Design.

82 Letter from B.C. Butler, Cultural Counsellor, Paris to Glen Bannerman, Director, Canadian Government Exhibition Commission, dated 4 March 1955, NAC RG 20 Vol. 997 Pt. 1. In Paris, the display was installed by furniture designer René Hebst.
feature in the way in which, to save space, the dining and living rooms are often combined in one area. An area approximately 240 square feet—the average size for combined living-dining rooms in small houses and flats now being built in Canada has been marked off...

Instead of showing high-end design objects, as one might assume a "prestige exhibition" would, Canada's presentation highlighted modern design that was available to most Canadians—those living on "average incomes." By displaying items that incorporated international modernism's tenet of the "good design" of everyday objects, Herbert Read's invocation to make objects available to the masses had already been incorporated into Canada's projection of its own national identity. Included in the display were a dining room table by Vancouver-based Robin Bush (whose work would be featured in the 1957 display) and Earle Morrison; and a desk by Frank Dudas and chair by Lawrie McIntosh—both of which had won awards in the 1953 NIDC competition. The brochure that accompanied the exhibit stressed the utilization of "modern materials" such as aluminum and plywood because they were available "economically and in large quantities in Canada." The writers were cautious when they attempted to define national design characteristics; Canadian design was placed in the context with that of both Great Britain and the United States, but was differentiated by its relationship to modern—and, in Canada's case, indigenously produced—materials. Highlighting the indigenous recalled the

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84 "Canadian Display (text for brochure)," NAC RG 72 Vol. 307 Pt. 1.

85 In 1954, Great Britain was an official participant, while the United States participated unofficially. Canada and Israel were the first official non-European exhibitors.
NIDC's earlier design competition that had encouraged design in the traditional medium of wood along with that in a technologically advanced material—aluminum. As well, because of the legislated lack of Canadian domestic design innovation during the war, factories were slow to introduce new technologies into the production of items for the home. Factories tended to utilize existing technologies in new ways, particularly those factories that had relied on military production. For example, the Canadian Wooden Aircraft Company in Stratford, Ontario switched to manufacturing moulded plywood furniture—known as the AeroClub collection—at the end of the Second World War in its search for an alternative to its feeding of the now-defunct war machine. According to the exhibit brochure:

It would be hard to say, however, that there is any distinctive Canadian type of industrial design. Professional designers...are fully aware of contemporary trends and are as much in the international movement in design as are their colleagues in Great Britain and the United States. What is original in their work is linked more to Canadian needs, dictates of economy of production and widespread use of such materials as aluminum and steel and plywoods and certain wood fibre products.

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86 Both the NIDC and the National Research Council encouraged the adaptation of modern technology to domestic use. A prime example is a moulded fiberglass auditorium chair designed by D.C. Simpson (later of Semmens Simpson, Architects of Vancouver) and A.J. Donahue (later of the School of Architecture, University of Manitoba). See Design For Use in Canadian Products, Ottawa: National Gallery of Canada, 1947: 7.


88 "Canadian Display (text for brochure),” NAC RG 72 Vol. 307 Pt. 1.
It was not only the use of these materials that made Canadian industrial designs different from those of other nations. The brochure also alluded to the conservatism of Canadian taste and the slow acceptance of innovative design. While it is not explicit in the copy, part of the reason for this conservatism may have been the lingering affect of Howe’s economic policies that had made innovative products difficult to obtain rather than the result of a conscious choice by Canadians.

Canadian manufacturing production, while similar in some respects to that of the United States, is yet different in that the home market it serves is smaller and less subject to yearly fluctuations in taste and fashion. For purposes of economy, if for no other reason, the Canadian manufacturer tends to keep his designs simple, to eliminate gadgets rather than add them.

Technical and aesthetic conservatism was noted as well by a writer for the Swedish magazine Form in his review of the Triennale. The writer lambasted the Italian hosts for their eccentrically designed products, and contrasted them with those in the Dutch and Canadian sections that were filled with “home and utility goods of sober design.” While he criticized many of the designers for neglecting the consideration of utility in contemporary design, he commended the Scandinavian, Dutch and Canadian designs as being “sane and utilitarian in conception.”

Perhaps some of the Triennale’s judges shared these opinions; Canada left with three gold diplomas and one bronze from the organizers of the fair. But many Canadian consumers had concurred with Form’s writer when


90 Gold Awards were presented to William Angus, Windsor for a “Wrought iron range for outdoor use;” Laurie McIntosh, Toronto for a “Steam-operated iron;” and A. Ernest Orr,
they had indicated their preference for contemporary housing over the
progressive modern style; and when the developers of Kitimat's residential areas
designed their uninspired tracts of housing.

Even after these critical accolades, the usefulness of the display was still debated
by staff members at the Canadian Embassy in Rome and its organizers in
Ottawa. Shirley MacDonald, Commercial Counsellor at the embassy
commended the quality of Canadian industrial design, but lamented the lack of
enquiries by European business people who wanted to do business with
Canadian designers, or wanted to import Canadian-designed products. He also
feared that European designers might steal ideas from the Canadian participants.
His report alluded to a difficulty in understanding the role of the Triennale, and
the place of design within Canadian cultural production.

The exhibit of the National Industrial Design Council of Canada is
neither a cultural exhibit in the sense of exhibits of, for example, the
National Gallery of Canada, nor a trade exhibit in the sense of those
which are arranged for at various fairs, etc. by the Canadian
Government Exhibition Commission and the Department of Trade
and Commerce. Thus a Canadian display of the National Industrial
Design Council of Canada rather falls between two stools....⁹¹

This placement "between two stools" (even if those stools may have exhibited the
requisite "good design"!) was an ongoing problem for Canadian design in

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⁹¹ Report by Mr. Shirley G. MacDonald, Commercial Counsellor, Canadian Embassy, Rome,
general and the NIDC in particular. After Buchanan organized *Design in Industry* for the National Gallery in 1946, he had proposed the formation of a design information service—what would later become the NIDC. But Buchanan had hoped that the responsibility for this service would come under the aegis of the National Research Council—the same organization that he had invited readers of *Canadian Art* to visit. By linking industrial design to engineering research, design could have been aligned with a rational, scientific approach to the future, rather than one that was associated with what could be perceived as mere modern taste or styling. To Buchanan's chagrin, the head of the Research Council did not see a relationship between aesthetics and engineering, even though this connection had been reiterated in modern design and architecture since the founding of the Bauhaus. The Department of Trade and Commerce, another of Buchanan's choices, felt that a private association should take on this responsibility, not the government. Only the National Gallery was interested. \(^{92}\) H.O. McCurry, director of the Gallery, was familiar with Read's rhetoric—along with that of Philip Johnson, board member of the Museum of Modern Art and promoter of the international style. \(^{93}\) For McCurry, industrial design was part of 20th century's machine aesthetic in art-making, and therefore was an easy fit within the mandate of the gallery. \(^{94}\) The NIDC, like the Canadian display in 1957, would continue to occupy a space between art and trade in manufactured goods until responsibility for the organization was handed over to the Department of Trade.

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94 On 21 March 1950, a new by-law was passed by the Board of Trustees of the National Gallery of Canada to create an industrial design section to work with the NIDC. NAC RG 20 Vol. 997 Pt. 2.
and Commerce in 1961. The organizers of the display at Milan weren’t so equivocal in their viewpoint about the results of their efforts and the role of industrial design as was Mr. MacDonald. In an undated and unsigned memo in the archives of the NIDC, the writer speaks only of the success of the 1954 display, and hopes that it can be built upon by a larger budget allocation for "photomontage backgrounds and new display installations." These photographs would form the starting point for the design of Canada’s display at the eleventh Triennale.

The news release for the display, mentioned at the beginning of this thesis, revealed that the NIDC designers sought to tell a story that would be “unique to Canada and of interest to Europeans,” instead of only including a general selection of “well-designed” goods. While the designers felt that they were working against the conceptualization of the earlier display, in fact they were continuing the 1954 theme of the provision of industrially designed objects to average Canadians. The designers, led by the newly appointed NIDC associate director Norman Hay, chose to look at Alcan’s housing accommodation at Kitimat. The economic base for Kitimat was not the heavy industry of Pittsburgh, Hamilton, Detroit or Windsor. Instead, aluminum was seen as a material for the future, and its production method was also progressive. (Its modernity warranted its inclusion in the exhibition programmes of cultural institutions. Along with its inclusion in the Art in Industry exhibition at the

95 NAC RG 72 Vol. 307 Pt. 1.


97 “Results of the discussion with Mr. Hay, Mr. Stranks and Mr. Simmons, January 30, 1957,” dated 31 January 1957, NAC RG 72 Vol. 307 Pt. 2.
National Gallery in 1946, it was also the subject of *Design in Aluminum*, an international travelling exhibition of advanced design organized by the Design Centre in 1955.98) Few of the workers toiled in dirty factory spaces; Alcan provided a technologically progressive environment for its workers. This is not to deny that there were dirty or dangerous jobs in the production of aluminum. However, the mode of production differed greatly from that of eastern-based steel industries that used technologies developed in another century. Raw materials were moved robotically, and processes were monitored in air-conditioned control rooms that resembled a strategic military headquarters rather than a production floor of a factory.99 Production workers were re-imaged (or perhaps re-imagined) as sophisticated system monitors rather than manual labourers. And, according to the display, after they had worked in these futuristic control rooms, they returned to modern, minimal rooms complete with designer furniture, reading materials and a vase of freshly cut flowers.100 No longer was the working-class man depicted as a hard-hatted, hard-headed red-neck; he had been transformed by technology into a literate, sophisticated man of the world.

The Aluminum Company of Canada had appointed Robin Bush of Robin Bush Associates in Vancouver and Toronto to design the interiors and furnishings for not only the company guest houses but also for single workers’ accommodations. According to the NIDC press release: “Mr. Bush designed furniture and chose

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98 For more information of the 1946 exhibition, see Collins, “Design in Industry’ Exhibition”: 27-38.

99 See photograph of “Alcan Aluminum Ltd. Interior,” British Columbia Archives 1-28168.

100 See photograph of “Potline Workers Bedroom,” “Canada at Fairs Abroad: Milan Triennale, 1957,” *Journal, Royal Architectural Institute of Canada* 34.9 (September 1957): 356.
fabric and colour which is on a level with the best in interior furnishings in the world. The worker’s rooms are furnished in the same high standard of design and quality of materials as are the guest lounges for executives and visitors.”

Alcan had thought that the provision of good accommodation would cut down the turnover in labour needed to build and maintain the smelter and construct the infrastructure for the townsite. This included the provision of houses for purchase by families and residences for single men. But there seems to have been some contestation about the overall good design, or even the adequacy, of the worker’s accommodation. Illustrations by Kitimat’s inhabitants and in the international press resist the NIDC and the corporation’s claims of a modernist workers’ utopia.

In cartoons dating from 1951 and 1952, Allan Beaton—who worked as an office worker for Alcan’s contractors, Kitimat Constructors—depicted cabins with less than modern creature comforts. An illustration from 1952 presented a room similar to a jail cell. A bare light bulb hung in the centre of a small room that contained only a bed. High up on the chipped plaster wall was a small window with bars to keep the new recruit from a pointless attempt at escape (at this time, all personnel and materials had to brought in by company plane or ferry). And, judging from the text that accompanied the image, the accommodation didn’t meet with the hype that had been provided to the prospective workers as they had been recruited in Vancouver.

The Camp Manager is a friendly, animated soul whose only object in life is to secure for you delightful accommodations, preferably

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with a view, and supplied with lots of blankets, towels, soap, snowy white linen, and all the comforts of home. The fact that the Camp Manager has never yet achieved this object is incidental.\textsuperscript{102}

A second image, from a year earlier, was accompanied by a caption which claims, tongue firmly planted in cheek, that “modern, spacious cabins, providing a home-like atmosphere, dot the landscape.” A rough, pitch-roofed cabin, complete with central stove and interior clothes lines, was filled with an assortment of rough-looking construction workers.\textsuperscript{103} Neither of these represented the workers’ room with the modern conveniences displayed in Milan. However, it should also be noted that the exhibition was 5-6 years after these cartoons—they depicted accommodations for the construction workers whereas the Triennale depicted those for permanent smelter workers. In a 1956 issue of \textit{National Geographic}, we see yet another room that fails to meet the modern standards set by the furnishings and shown in the photographs that were displayed a year later in Milan, but foreshadowed the treatment of the working-class single male. Alcan had purchased an old paddle wheeler, the “Delta King,” to be outfitted in the south for workers’ accommodations, and then sailed up the Douglas Channel. In the photograph, two construction workers shared a room that may have enjoyed the home-like atmosphere that Beaton had mentioned in his 1951 cartoon, but its tartan-covered table and surface-wired lamp hardly qualified as being “on a level with the best in interior furnishings”


\textsuperscript{103} Beaton, \textit{Kitimat 51: Series of Cartoons made on the Site of Canada’s Largest Construction Project with Kitimat Constructors, for the Aluminum Co. of Canada, Ltd.}, Vancouver: MacAdam, 1951.
reading a book (two small bookshelves—holding a copy of Roget’s Thesaurus among other volumes—hang from the walls) and talked to his roommate, who was in the process of writing. The sophistication of the two workers was augmented by the text which discussed the men’s globe-trotting adventures. On the table sat a clock that had been seen in the National Gallery’s Design in Industry exhibition, and a radio to allow the men to keep in touch with the outside world. Albert Mayer, one of Kitimat’s designers, had written about the importance of global communications: “Radio and television afford cultural opportunities which mean that the cultural life of smaller cities need no longer be barren or seriously handicapped.” The men living in the Delta King were depicted as sophisticated individuals, living in a remote location. The NIDC display in Milan built on this image.

The NIDC illustrated the company’s accommodation for single male workers in a photograph in the second section of the display, surrounded by some examples of its furnishings. Naivety and sophistication were combined in this photograph. The picture showed a minimalist room within a temporary structure, the exterior of which can be seen through the room’s window. As with the Delta King, the pot-line workers, for whom these rooms were constructed, slept two to a room. The Bush-designed twin beds, covered with matching bedspreads can be seen as an enfantilization of these adult workers. By eliminating the maturity of its occupants, it was easier for them to be seen as being under the paternalistic care


106 Some of these temporary H-shaped structures form Riverlodge Recreation Centre, a district-run multi-purpose centre today.
and control of Alcan company officials—in an atmosphere that was often considered to be outside of societal controls.\textsuperscript{107} The workers were no longer "roughing it in the bush," but were shown to be housed in sophisticated surroundings that resembled the suburban rooms of teenage boys more than the accommodations of adult wage earners. This projection of worldly innocence could be read against reports of the activities of single male workers who constructed the smelter and townsite—the forebears of the potline workers for whom this room was designed. In his book about the construction of Kitimat, Jack Kendrick stated that bootlegging, gambling and homosexual activities took place on the campsite, but all were "condoned as long as it did not create overt problems."\textsuperscript{108} Kendrick's statement acknowledged "other histories" that have been subsumed in the metahistory of the period. Most historical accounts of the period lack a consideration of sexuality even when they acknowledge gender. The accommodation of workers portrayed in the display was meant to reflect the heterosexual hegemony of most accounts of masculinity and working men in the 1950s. While the enfantalization of the workers may have negated any possible violation of the hegemonic codes of behaviour (these violations included alcoholism, gambling and any sexual activity—homo or heterosexual\textsuperscript{109}), other elements of the image deconstructed different hegemonic concepts.

\textsuperscript{107} This corporate paternalism is similar to that demonstrated in other homosocial environments such as university dormitories and military barracks. For more information, see Modernism at Mid-Century: The Architecture of the United States Air Force Academy, Ed. Robert Bruegmann, Chicago: University of Chicago, 1994 and Stud: Architectures of Masculinity, Ed. Joel Sanders, New York: Princeton Architectural Press, 1996.

\textsuperscript{108} Kendrick, People of the Snow: 96.

\textsuperscript{109} Allan Beaton's cartoons reveal the frustrations of the lack of heterosexual activity in the homosocial construction campsites. In one image from Kitimat 51, a frustrated worker is urged to spend "perhaps a week or two in Prince Rupert" because he has spent too long on the all-male campsite.
The photograph included a bookshelf similar to those in the Delta King, along with a mug and a vase of flowers sitting on the desk. These elements allowed the occupants—who, unlike those in National Geographic, are outside the photograph—to be constructed as sophisticated individuals who appreciated refined products. One other reference to sophistication was included—the only non-Canadian product in the display. A fiberglass chair designed in California by the husband-and-wife team of Charles and Ray Eames is placed at the desk in the centre of the photograph. This chair was familiar to a worldwide audience for its advanced design and easy availability. By including this chair, the NIDC provided an international audience with key element in understanding the pervasiveness of affordable design in Canada. As the didactic panel on the wall stated, the display’s theme was the awareness of good design in Canada’s urban centres and its outlying regions.¹¹⁰

The sophistication of the industry, the community and the worker was repeated throughout the display. A thin aluminum grid, anodized black in contrast to the white burlap walls, provided the structure for the first section of the exhibit—which included items selected from the Design Index. The “Kitimat room,” at the rear of the display was raised one step above the first display of design items in order to indicate a change in theme. Display techniques also changed from one area to another. In the Kitimat room, the furniture was placed directly on the floor, as it would normally have been placed in a room or seen in a model home.


urged to spend “perhaps a week or two in Prince Rupert” because he has spent too long on the all-male campsite.
interest in promoting international modernism. When Bush was asked about Canadian design, he carefully responded: “I do not think good design in itself is necessarily indigenous. It is actually fairly international....” Furnishings by Bush included a convertible settee and matching chair, a coffee and matching end table and a dining chair similar to those used for the Alcan guests’ lodgings as well as a desk, desk chair and armchair from the workers’ quarters. The furnishings for the guests’ lodgings were produced by Snyder’s, a furniture company in Waterloo, Ontario that produced an extensive line of modern furnishings; those from the workers’ quarters had been produced by Bush’s own company, Robin Bush Associates with offices in Vancouver and Toronto. By the time that the exhibit opened, Herman Miller—a Michigan-based furniture company—had taken over production of the workers’ furniture (renaming it the “Hotel Group”) when Bush accepted a position as the third designer at the company; the other two designers were George Nelson and Charles Eames—the designer of the fibreglass chair in the photograph. But the fibreglass chair in the photograph had been replaced in the exhibit with a moulded plywood chair, designed by Jan Kuypers and manufactured by Imperial Furniture in Stratford—a chair that was not included as part of the contract furnishings of the single men’s living quarters. The side walls were covered in the same white burlap as the rest of the display and were overlaid with a checkerboard of images of the guests’ and workers’ housing along with the text panel. The back wall was pale

111 “Do Canadians Want Modern Furniture?” Canadian Art 12.3 (Spring 1955): 129.


113 “Manufactured Articles for the Eleventh Triennale di Milano. NAC RG 72 Vol. 307 Pt. 2.
yellow, and had a large photo mural of Mount DuBose on it. Mount DuBose appeared to be a rugged, natural mountain—similar to motifs that have formed the visual tropes of Canadian identity for decades. Only a scar, shaped like the numeral seven, belied its natural state. This scar was the only visual indication of the power plant that was housed within this mountain. Like the North American Air Defense (NORAD) control room that was hidden deep within Cheyenne Mountain in Colorado a decade later, this source of industrial power was hidden from view. The NORAD alliance between the United States and Canada was established as a reaction against the possibility of an air attack after the launch of the Soviet Sputnik satellite—during the time that the Triennale di Milano was open in 1957. Its decision to base its operations within a mountain was made because of its remoteness from locations of prime targets of attack.

While Cheyenne Mountain and Mount DuBose shared technological innovation and geographic isolation, they differed greatly in purpose. Unlike its NORAD counterpart, the power emitted from Mount DuBose was used to fuel the battle for the domestic sphere as well as military superiority.

The display elements along the walls in the first section of the display—the fine black aluminum brackets and simple cedar shelves holding sets of pots and coffee percolators—evoked the simplicity of the international modernist aesthetic while simultaneously representing the bounty of the local resource-based economy. Here, industrial design objects were juxtaposed with objects that

114 Originally the back wall was to have been orange-red, to match the background of the lead panel, however Norman Hay changed the colour when he was on site. Handwritten letter to Andy [Stranks] from Brownie [R.G. Brown?], Milan, dated 28 July 1957. NAC RG 72 Vol. 307 Pt. 3.

115 For more information about the Cheyenne Mountain facility, see Peterson Airforce Base website: www.peterson.af.mil/norad/cmocfb.htm.
would have been considered to be "fine arts"—paintings by B.C. Binning, Harold Town and Takao Tanabe, and sculptural works by Don Wallace, Louis Archambault, Stanley Lewis and an unnamed Inuit artist.\textsuperscript{116} While these objects may have been more typical of the objects displayed at prestige exhibitions, they were out of context in the Milan display. All of the other participating countries were represented by objects that had been commercially manufactured rather than made as "fine art." Perhaps this combination of design and fine art was facilitated by the fact that the display was organized by a department of the National Gallery of Canada, rather than a design organization associated with a group of manufacturers. The Gallery's dual interests in one-of-a-kind and production objects may have prompted a dual allegiance. Or perhaps it related to an uncertainty about the role of the machine-made objects in a society that had fetishized the unique? By showing production works to be equal to paintings and sculpture, the organizers may have been attempting to validate it—using fine art as a benchmark of artistic value. This validation was made even more apparent by the gallery-like display techniques used in the first section. Instead of exhibiting photographs in a checkerboard pattern as they had been in the "Kitimat room," they were installed in the front section in a row—as paintings would have been in a gallery. The furniture in this section was raised off the floor and onto platforms. Here was a literal elevation of the production item to the level of fine art. When pots and pans were displayed on a retail-like shelf, they were shown alongside sculptures such as Archambault's \textit{Femme rayée de gris}. The fine arts selections, with their abstracted geometric forms, were subsumed within the design aesthetic of the display rather than standing in opposition to the industrial products. But the display's pots and pans not only problematized

\textsuperscript{116} "Fine Arts for the Eleventh Triennale di Milano," NAC RG 72 Vol. 307 Pt. 2.
hierarchies of artistic production, they also questioned the binary of the male/producer/public and female/consumer/private.

The display is foregrounded by an almost life-sized colour photograph—supposedly of an Alcan worker. According to the Canadian Government Exhibition Commission employee who installed the exhibit: "[t]he front panel 'Man with Chair' is very good and gets quite a lot of attention." He stands in contrapposto, his arms crossed across his chest. His gaze meets the gaze of the viewer. This idea of the object of our gaze looking back at us—even past us—reconfirms notions of power—to look is thought of as active, to be looked at as passive. The man in photograph is self-assured in the return of our gaze. But what is this self-assurance based on? And why is he surrounded by pots and pans?

The image of the working class male had become part of the visual iconography of the fifties. Actors like James Dean and Montgomery Clift in the United States and Dirk Bogarde in Britain were presented to audiences around the world as counterpoints to established figures like Clark Gable and John Wayne. While the older generation of actors represented the oppression and repression experienced

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120 Bogarde appeared in the Rank Organisation's British film, Campbell's Kingdom, that was released in 1957. This film's story is of the resistance to the construction of a dam in the Canadian Rockies. Bogarde's character opposes the dam; his opposition is based on his claim to the oil rights to the land that would have been submerged by its construction.
throughout the war years, the young “rebels” represented an optimistic view that progress and modernity could bring about social change. The new generation of actors—through their “Method” training—sought to portray a gritty reality on the screen rather than considering movies to be modern fairy tales. These figures were seen as being sexual individuals that, unlike their predecessors, many parents would consider to be immoral; in time, they became the models for those involved in the sexual revolution of the 1960s.  

The designers placed Canada at the forefront of social change by alluding to these “rebels” in its display. The youthfulness represented by this image may also represent a “new” Canada, unencumbered by its past. A year earlier, Canadian Lester Pearson successfully brokered a peace pact to end the Suez Canal crisis. The agreement placed Canada in alliance with the United States and opposed to Britain and France—unsettling past affiliations and firmly planting Canada in the “new” world.

As well, this working class figure could be read as a representation of the availability of commodities to all classes of Canadians in all parts of the country—even the outlying regions mentioned in the didactic text on the wall of the display. By converting tax dollars into assistance programmes through socialist-inspired policies, Canadians enjoyed more equitable access to domestic goods. Both factory workers and their managers could shop for products that provided them a civilizing enclave while domesticating the often harsh Canadian landscape. In Kitimat, the establishment of a Hudson’s Bay Store—complete with a selection of modern design goods for the home—allowed universal access to

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these items. These pioneering individuals did not have to use enamelled coffee pots on open fires as others pioneers had; instead they could temper the harsh environment with coffee brewed in state-of-the-art aluminum pots. Finally, the use of the male worker legitimized the display of such domestic goods in an international forum. In *As Long as it's Pink*, Penny Sparke argued that “taste” belonged in the sphere of women, while “design”--with its connection with industry--fell into the masculine domain.\(^{123}\) By prefacing the display--even if it was filled with ironing boards and pots and pans--with a photograph of a masculine male, the designers were reiterating Canada’s place within the sphere of the progressive, modernist, male enclave of industrial design rather than as part of the feminized interior more often portrayed in contemporary lifestyle magazines--where the housewife had domesticated modernism by adding pastel colours to the stark surfaces of electrical appliances.\(^{124}\)

The goods surrounding the Alcan man were influenced by the international modernist aesthetic that had been the focus of the NIDC’s promotion. Ironically, two of the chairs and a coffee table that had been brought to Milan were designed by Robert Kaiser for his company Primavera--a name chosen because of his perception that the name would appeal to Canadians because of its exotic Italian sound and its ephemeral connection to Italian design.\(^{125}\) Another chair--the chair that was included in the large photograph in the front of the display--

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\(^{123}\) Penny Sparke, *As Long as it's Pink: The Sexual Politics of Taste*, London: Pandora Imprint of HarperCollins, 1995. In fact, most industrial designers in this period were male. For a contestation of this gender binary, see Pat Kirkham’s re-evaluation of Charles and Ray Eames’ interactions in *Charles and Ray Eames: Designers of the Twentieth Century*.

\(^{124}\) Ibid., particularly “‘A Kind of Golden Age: Goods and Femininity’”: 187-203.

was the only piece of furniture in Canada’s display that was designed by a woman. Although the chair was shown with the Alcan worker, Sigrun Bulow-Hube’s furniture designs, like those of Jan Kuypers, were not part of the Bush furnishings for Kitimat. The presence of the Alcan man with the chair may have been meant to tie the display of Design Index products in the front of the display to the back section dealing with Kitimat as the embodiment of Canadian design and technological progress. A Freudian analysis could have shown the chair, gendered female—in part because of its designer, passively opening herself to the viewer; her invitation frustrated by the presence of a masculine element—the lunch box—that rendered her purposeless to anyone other than the man that was standing behind her. And perhaps, judging by the flaccid work hat that hung off the chair, the female presence was of little use to the Alcan man either. But this questioning of gender became even more complex. By juxtaposing the man and the products, the dichotomy of male as producer and female as consumer was also being questioned. The male could be both producer and consumer. But was the same thing possible for women? Certainly much contemporary advertising maintained the domestic as the sole sphere for women; but in 1951, 25% of married women in Canada were working outside the house. By the time of this display, that number would have only increased. Women were working in both the public and private spheres by the mid-1950s. Perhaps the placement of the man with pots and pans was meant to resist the popular portrayal of gendered space.

Lois Lister of Toronto designed plant containers and Micheline Knaff designed fabric for the display. Unlike Buow-Hube’s participation, these two designers work maintained the craft/female, design/male dichotomy.

Owram, Born at the Right Time: 29. This is not to say that there was equity in employment opportunities, however most single women and 25% of married women were wage-earners.
The resistance to a gender-based division of space warrants further investigation. In this example, resistance may have been affected by those involved in the design of the display. When Alan Jarvis was appointed Director of the National Gallery—the institution that housed the NIDC—in 1955, he had brought Norman Hay with him from England to work as associate director of the Council. It was Hay who had devised the theme and general design of the display. Hay, like Jarvis who had been a public relations officer at Britain's Council of Industrial Design (COID) before returning to Canada, stressed the mass-production model of design that had been key to the COID's strategy. The objects and furniture chosen for the display reflected this interest even as Canadian industries returned to the production of more traditional items. The display featured Kitimat's earlier homosocial environment even as it was encouraging families to locate there. Hay was also an openly gay man who was part of an English cross-class tradition of homosexual desire. A great deal of homoerotic English literature from the late 19th and early 20th centuries was based on the interaction of the upper-class men with working-class lovers. Both Oscar Wilde and E.M. Forster depict these inter-class liaisons in their writings. Did the use of the Alcan worker, toiling away in a homosocial environment, 

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128 Charles Hill, private conversation, 19 September 1999.

129 "Results of the discussion with Mr. Hay, Mr. Stranks and Mr. Simmons, January 30, 1957," dated 31 January 1957, NAC RG 72 Vol. 307 Pt. 2.


relate to Hay’s desire for a working class “other,” or was he indicative of a
general questioning of masculinity in the 1950s?

Reports of the display can not answer this question, however they can reflect
upon the success of the conveyance of other messages. Canadian designs were
deemed to be competitive when Poltronova, an Italian furniture manufacturer,
wrote to Bush with an offer to produce his designs. Canadian Art remarked
that “Canada’s exhibit [at Milan] was unique in having a social theme.” The
design of modern, affordable objects—available even to working-class men—
differentiated the display from those of other countries. This being the case, the
display in Milan was a successful embodiment of the qualities of caring and
equity that the Canadian government had legislated after the war. This message
of sophistication and caring was so strong that Hay later claimed that the display
caused an increase in applications to immigrate to Canada by working-class
Italians, even though federal policy encouraged “professional people” to
immigrate. The “rugged quality,” mentioned in the American journal
Industrial Design, may have referred to the display, but it could also be applied to
the objects within it. This was not an oxymoron but an approach to the depiction
of Canadian national identity that incorporated the myth of the Canadian north
with the sophistication of its civilization. Sophistication is a pervasive, yet
seldom discussed, component of Canadian identity. Perhaps its lack of profile

By this time, Bush was under contract with Herman Miller.


135 Virginia Wright, Modern Furniture in Canada 1920–1970, Toronto, Buffalo and London:
University of Toronto, 1997: 155.

reinforces its presence. In 1995, Stephen Blank, American director of Canadian Affairs for the Americas Society stated that “[Canadians] have, although you refuse to admit it and would rather not be told it, a civilizing mission in North American.” And, in projecting sophistication, Canadian officials utilized a paradoxical paternalistic corporate example to portray their socialist-influenced ideas. Instead of representing the nuclear family that was living in Kitimat at the time, the NIDC chose to represent the equitable access to consumer goods within its previous homosocial environment. Kitimat, which could have been seen as a company town because of Alcan’s role in decision-making and construction, was conflated with the universal availability of consumer products by average Canadians who were supported with family allowance cheques and old-age pensions. The display blurred the private realm of corporate entrepreneurialism and the public construction of the social safety net. Canada, in its attempt to portray itself as sophisticated and socially equitable, utilized a transnational corporation’s private initiative and a grouping of domestic objects to do so.

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Conclusion

Good design in Canada, which scarcely affected the nation’s thinking 10 years ago, is today finding recognition across the country. In addition to native-born Canadian, many skilled designers and craftsmen have emigrated from Europe, bringing their talents and techniques to the field of industrial design.\textsuperscript{138}

The National Industrial Design Council’s 1957 exhibit at the Triennale di Milano was one of three concurrent exhibitions that looked at the importance of the domestic sphere in the reconstruction of Canada and formation of its new, modern national identity. The Canadian Government Exhibition Commission presented a model of the planned Toronto suburb of Don Mills at the Berlin Industries Fair.\textsuperscript{139} At the international architectural exhibition that formed part of the Bienal di Sao Paulo in Brazil, photographs of houses in Vancouver and Victoria were included as part of the display. Together with the exhibit in Milan, these displays were intended to represent Canada’s awareness of international concepts of modernity. No longer did the country represent itself as a wild, natural environment that was known for its primary resources. George Englesmith, an architect and professor at the University of Toronto, had foreshadowed this evolution in an article in the \textit{Ottawa Journal} in 1955.

Canada’s trading position has been dependent largely on primary industries such as mining, agriculture and fisheries...Our national

\textsuperscript{138} From copy for didactic panel in the Canadian display at 1957 Triennale di Milano, “Didactic panel--1st section,” NAC RG 72 Vol. 307 Pt. 2.

pride and international prestige depend on our ability to design well and, in turn, to manufacture well.\(^{140}\)

Although the display in Milan included a photographic image of Kitimat's natural surroundings, it did not focus solely on Canada's primary resources. The ability to design and manufacture goods was highlighted as well. Easily accessible resources were combined with images of sophistication and worldly awareness, including the knowledge of urban planning and industrial design aesthetics. These were relatively modern practices—both had been practiced before, but it was only when, at the turn of the century, the social drawbacks of industrialization were understood that they became autonomous areas of study. By demonstrating the nation's knowledge, and use, of these modern fields, Canada could align itself with other technologically advanced countries. But Canada's representation in Milan also differed from other industrialized nations.

As *Canadian Art* claims, Canada's representation was the only one with a social theme. Because of the attention they had paid to the legislation of equitable access to social, economic and cultural programmes, Canadians had sought to construct a more communitarian nation. The impetus for the creation of many of the social and economic programmes had been the threat of an economic downturn after the Second World War. Aesthetics of modernism, with its goal of equitable access to consumer goods through the use of "good design" and modern technology, also contributed to a sense of generalized social equity. Although these values were to be modified by the diminution of fears of

uncertainty, they are still represented in Canadian social policy and continue to be debated.\textsuperscript{141}

The placement of the Alcan worker in juxtaposition with goods made for the domestic sphere problematized a gender binary that was already coming into question by William Whyte in his book \textit{Organizational Man}, and would be continued to be raised by Betty Freidan's \textit{The Feminine Mystique}. While both the masculine worker and the inclusion of rarefied fine arts acted as ways of legitimizing the display of industrially designed objects, domestic goods also represented Canada as a softer and gentler nation. This idea of gentleness deconstructed popular notions of masculinized nation-states whose existence were based on military prowess. In his book on Canadian nationalism, historian Richard Gwyn remarked on this de-masculinization.

Shelves of books have been written about the cross-border national differences [between Canada and the United State]. One way to cut through all of them is to say that Canada represents the feminine principle in North America. The Americans had the Vietnam War and riots in Watts and Harlem; we had medicare and peacekeeping. Today, they have the homeless and assault weapons; we have social programmes and gun registration.\textsuperscript{142}

While the division between the two North American nations may not be as clear as Gwyn claims, Canada has encouraged its portrayal as a peaceful, caring and


advanced nation. Norman Hay’s concept for the NIDC display utilized these values in its portrayal of an equitable modernity—social and cultural—that was available to all Canadians, both in the urban centres and in outlying areas.

Now, 10 years after the fall of the Berlin Wall, the siege for the domestic realm has resurfaced. On Thursday, 13 January 2000, Bill Gates, when announcing his retirement as Microsoft’s chief executive officer, stated that he was going to “focus ‘almost 100 per cent’ on the company’s next generation of software.”¹⁴³ This next generation of software—unlike the academic and security based technological innovations of the recent past—is destined for the kitchens of the world. As Simon Tuck noted in the Globe and Mail the following morning, “[t]he guy who runs your computer wants to take over your kitchen.”¹⁴⁴ This new wired kitchen would resemble, on a small scale, the control room that maintained the industrial operations in Kemano and the one that monitored North America’s safety from air attacks in Colorado. Domestic space has become again a locus for the battle for international superiority. This time, it is a contested site for the transformation of everyday lives in the battle for control of the e-economy. In 1957, it also served as a fitting metaphor for the construction of a new Canadian identity.

There is still much work to be done on the issues raised by this project. Kitimat experienced the affects of a multi-cultural society before most other Canadian communities. According to Hay, its attention in the press, as well as its exposure at Milan, prompted many individuals to investigate immigration to this town in


¹⁴⁴ Ibid.
the northern half of British Columbia. How did these ethnicities operate within a single-industry, isolated community? Did Canada's great, white north allow for those who were not white? Secondly, the story of design in Canada has yet to be told. The flurry of activity in the early years of the 1950s was replaced by a decade of calm, which in turn was followed by more activity generated by the Canadian centennial and Expo 67. How does the story of design during the postwar period in Canada relate to other discourses—those of craft, art, and architecture, both in Canada and outside? How were these discourses affected by the gender binary that had yet to be dismantled by the sexual revolution of the 1960s? And how were they affected by gay liberation in the 1970s? The history of labour has yet to address issues of sexuality as well as gender. During Kitimat's construction period, approximately 5,000 men worked at any specified time—perhaps 25,000 in total; comparatively few women lived or worked on the site. Can we understand the concept of masculinity if we do not study all of its component parts—including its perception in homosocial environments? Finally, what has happened to Kitimat, and what will the future hold?

Canada's display at the Triennale di Milano in 1957, paralleled the multifaceted character of Canadian society during the immediate postwar period. Kitimat was then chosen to represent Canadian values for its combination of nature, technology and modern design. Here was a small town, located in the northern half of British Columbia, that not only produced a modern product—aluminum—in a modern way, but also did it in sophisticated, planned community. A better understanding of Kitimat enhances comprehension of Canada's struggle to distance itself from its British heritage of paternalism and differentiate itself from its southern neighbour's rugged individualism.
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