

Friedrich Kiesler, Designer

Sitzmöbel der 30er und 40er Jahre. Einleitung von Monika Pessler, Text von Tulga Beyerle, Harald Krejci

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- 2 Blick in die „Internationale Ausstellung neuer Theatertechnik“, Wien 1924.
View of the “Internationale Ausstellung neuer Theatertechnik“, Vienna 1924.
- 3 Friedrich Kiesler, Theo van Doesburg, Enrico Prampolini beim Aufbau des *Leger- und Trägersystems*, Wien 1924.
Frederick Kiesler, Theo van Doesburg, Enrico Prampolini installing the *L+T-System*, Vienna 1924.
- 4 *Raumstadt* zur „Exposition des Arts Décoratifs et Industriels Modernes“, Paris 1925.
City in Space at the “Exposition des Arts Décoratifs et Industriels Modernes“, Paris 1925.
- 5 Oswald Haerdtl, Gestaltung der Architektur-sektion des Österreichischen Pavillons zur „Exposition des Arts Décoratifs et Industriels Modernes“, Paris 1925.
Oswald Haerdtl, Architecture section of the Austrian Pavilion at the “Exposition des Arts Décoratifs et Industriels Modernes“, Paris 1925.

Seat Furniture as Architecture

The architect Frederick Kiesler, born in Cernauti in 1890, began his artistic career in Vienna in the early nineteen-twenties. He created the Vienna *Space Stage* and designed the “International Exhibition of New Theatre Technique” in 1924, (Fig. 2, 3) before successfully joining the ranks of the European artist avant-garde with *City in Space* (Fig. 4) in 1925. As the last official member of the Dutch avant-garde group De Stijl, it is there that Frederick Kiesler found intellect support for his uncompromising approaches to a dynamic conception of space and his associated universal design theory. The painter and theorist Theo van Doesburg was a great believer in Kiesler’s concept of architecture and wrote euphorically of his exhibition designs, “In no city in the world have I seen anything similar to it. [...] in this method of demonstration the closest relations between the different works were established by their arrangement in space.”¹ and notes, “You have done what we all hoped to accomplish one day. To unite the arts.”² Exhibition furniture and architectural model in one, this extension of the object in its functional significance constitutes one of Frederick Kiesler’s key design principles. It is born of a holistic conception of space that was subsequently also to impact on his furniture designs. Regarding the extended function of furniture, Kiesler summarized his understanding as follows in 1947, “The different functions were contained in the primary structure of the initial cell just as the multiple, specialized functions of organs are already contained in the amorphous embryo of the human body.”³ The human body is hence not only a design-based metaphor of form, but, in the complexity of its functional relations, also provides a possibility of gauging the potential of a multifunctional perception of the object that is strongly geared to human needs.

Exposition des Arts Décoratifs et Industriels Modernes

A major event both in the history of design and for Frederick Kiesler’s furniture design was the arts and crafts show “Exposition des Arts Décoratifs et Industriels Modernes” held in Paris in 1925. Co-founder of the Vienna Secession and the Wiener Werkstätten (Vienna Workshops) Josef Hoffmann commissioned Kiesler to design the theatre section of the Austrian pavilion. Kiesler’s *Raumstadt*, as he called it, proved to be a major success among the avant-garde artists. The other pavilions at the arts show failed to come up to expectations, just as the overall show failed to achieve its declared goal – to showcase models and works of new inspiration and real originality and to disregard copies or imitations of previous styles.⁴ The organizers based their selection on the abstract, ornamental objects of the Wiener Werkstätten or the French exponents of Art Nouveau and Art Déco. Dominated by traditional craft work, the show remained committed to a luxury-ridden, ornamental, labored use of forms. The pavilion by Émile-Jacques Ruhlmann or interior designs by

1 Frederick Kiesler, “New Display Techniques for ‘Art of This Century’ designed by Frederick Kiesler”, in: *Architectural Forum*, 78, 2, 1943, p. 50.

2 Thomas H. Creighton, “Kiesler’s Pursuit of an Idea”, in: *Progressive Architecture*, 42, 7, 1961, p. 104.

3 Frederick Kiesler, “Manifest du Corréalisme”, in: *L’Architecture d’Aujourd’hui*, 6, 1949, p. 145.

4 Heinz Hirdina, “Die Avantgarde und der Weg nach Byzanz”, in: *Form + Zweck*, 9+10, 1994, p. 81 ff.