



Smithsonian

National Museum of American History Kenneth E. Behring Center

Guide to the Lester Beall Collection

NMAH.AC.1278

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Collection Overview

Repository:	Archives Center, National Museum of American History
Title:	Lester Beall collection
Date:	1933-[circa 1967]
Identifier:	NMAH.AC.1278
Creator:	Beall, Lester, 1903-
Extent:	1 Cubic foot (1 box)
Language:	English .

Administrative Information

Immediate Source of Acquisition

All materials were donated to the museum by Mr. Lester Beall, Jr. in 1998.

Provenance

The collection was transferred to the Archives Center in 2012.

Processing Information

Collection is unprocessed.

Preferred Citation

Lester Beall collection, 1933-circa 1967, Archives Center, National Museum of American History.

Restrictions on Access

Collection is open for research but is stored off-site and special arrangements must be made to work with it. Contact the Archives Center for information at archivescenter@si.edu or 202-633-3270.

Conditions Governing Use

Collection items available for reproduction, but the Archives Center makes no guarantees concerning copyright restrictions. Other intellectual property rights may apply. Archives Center cost-recovery and use fees may apply when requesting reproductions.

Biographical / Historical

American designer Lester Beall (1903-1969) was educated at Lane Technical School in Chicago and received a bachelor's degree in art history from the University of Chicago. Upon discovering the work of the European avant-garde, Beall was inspired to bring American design of the 1930s and 1940s to a higher level of effective visual communication. Self-taught, Lester Beall was one of the first Americans to have his work shown in a German monthly graphics periodical, *Gebrauchsgraphik*, and was one of the first Americans to incorporate the New Typography, using techniques such as photomontage, collage and the use of cut-out flat colored paper in combination with photography and economical line drawing, reworking the element of

European modernism into distinctive American style. He produced solutions to graphic design problems that were unique among his American contemporaries.

Beall moved from Chicago to New York in 1935 and did work that was influential to the field of editorial design. Between 1938 and 1940, he redesigned twenty magazines for McGraw Hill, in 1946 he designed two covers for Fortune and in 1944, he began designing Scope magazine for UpJohn Pharmaceuticals which he did until 1951. In 1952, Beall opened a design office on Dumbarton Farm, his home in rural Connecticut. In 1973, four years after his death, Lester Beall was inducted into the New York Art Directors Club Hall of Fame.

Philip B. Meggs credits Beall with "almost single-handedly launching the modern movement in American design". In 1973, four years after his death, the Art Directors Club of New York belatedly elected him to its prestigious Hall of Fame. Bob Plisken, who worked for Beall in the early 1940s, said on that occasion, "In my opinion, Beall did more than anyone to make graphic design in American a distinct and respected profession".

Scope and Contents

This collection documents the career of Lester Beall, graphic designer and commercial artist from approximately 1933-1967.

Arrangement

Record Groups include:

- I. "Scope" Magazine
- II. Modern Art 5,000 Years Ago
- III. Red Cross Magazines
- IV. Greeting Cards
- V. Time Magazine ads
- VI. Logo Designs
- VII. Cone Automatic Machine Co., tear sheets
- VIII. Miscellaneous Covers
- IX. George Bijur, Inc.
- X. Labatt's of Canada and Catch! Narragansett Ale design campaigns
- XI. Exhibition, Art Center, California
- XII. Abbott Laboratories, "What's New"
- XIII. Marshall Field and Company
- XIV. Miscellaneous Advertisements

Bibliographic References

Lester Beall. Brookfield Center, Conn. : Lester Beall, Inc., [197-?].

Bibliographic References

Nine Pioneers in American Graphic Design / Roger R. Remington and Barbara J. Hodik. Cambridge, Mass. : MIT Press, 1989.

Bibliographic References

Lester Beall : trailblazer of American graphic design / Roger R. Remington. New York : W.W. Norton, 1996.

Bibliographic References

Graphic Design History / Steven Heller and Georgette Balance. New York : Allworth Press, 2001.

Names and Subject Terms

This collection is indexed in the online catalog of the Smithsonian Institution under the following terms:

Subjects:

Commercial art -- Sources -- History -- 20th century -- United States
Graphic arts -- Sources -- History -- 20th century -- United States

Types of Materials:

Advertisements
Announcements
Design drawings
Exhibition catalogs
Greeting cards
Logos
Photographs -- 20th century
Posters
Tear sheets

Names:

Abbott Laboratories
Art Directors Club (New York, N.Y.)
Chance Vought Corporation
Chicago Tribune (Firm)
Cone Automatic Machine Company
Cooper-Hewitt Design Archive
George Bijur, Inc.
Hauck, Fred
Heim Jeunes Filles
House of Herbs, Inc.
International Paper Company
Labatt's Canada Limited
Marshall Field & Company (Chicago, Ill.)
Merrill Lynch, Pierce, Fenner & Smith, inc.
Museum of Modern Art (New York, N.Y.)

Narragansett Brewing Co.
Stanley Works Inc.
Upjohn Company

Occupations:

Commercial artists -- United States
Graphic designers -- United States

Places:

Dumbarton Farm (Brookfield, Conn.)

Preferred Titles:

American printer (New York, N.Y.)
Fortune
McCall's (Los Angeles, Calif. : 1921)
Red Cross magazine
Time