Guide to the Lester Beall Collection

NMAH.AC.1278

NMAH Staff
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Collection Overview

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


Restrictions on Access

Unrestricted research access on site by appointment., Unprotected photographs must be handled with gloves.

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".

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Scope and Contents

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

Arrangement

Record Groups include: Unprocessed; 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. Misc. 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. Misc. Advertisements.

Bibliographic References

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

Bibliographic References

Bibliographic References


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Bibliographic References


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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

Geographic Names:
    Dumbarton Farm (Brookfield, Conn.)

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