

**communiqué /press release****For immediate release****TOYS AND THE MODERNIST TRADITION****15 December 1993 to 1 May 1994**

**Montréal, 14 December 1993** -- Technological advances as well as the general social, political, and economic climate have always been of great interest to architects. **Toys and the Modernist Tradition**, presented from 15 December 1993 to 1 May 1994, looks at how toy manufacturers responded to the exciting and rapidly changing ideas of modern architects. Many of the exhibited toys were designed by such leading architects of the modern movement as Bruno Taut, Josef Hoffmann, and Charles Eames. This is the fourth in the CCA's series of annual exhibitions drawn from its Collection of Architectural Toys and Games.

One of the astoundingly brilliant periods of artistic expression took form in the first third of the twentieth century. Mies van der Rohe's glass skyscraper proposals of 1929 were to have a profound impact on tall buildings for more than half a century. Earlier theoretical, social, and aesthetic concerns came together in Europe in large-scale housing experiments, ultimately symbolized by the Weissenhofsiedlung organized by Mies van der Rohe in 1927. These pure, cube-like concrete-and-steel buildings, painted white, with planes of primary red, yellow, and blue, embody the very idea of modernist architecture.

According to Philip Johnson, modernist architecture was to have "1) the regularity of skeleton structure as an ordering force in place of axial symmetry; 2) the treatment of exteriors as weightless, non-supporting skins rather than as heavy solids, obedient to gravity; 3) the use of colour and structural detail in place of applied ornament" (in *Mies van der Rohe [New York: Museum of Modern Art, 1947]*).

Toy designers mirrored the investigations of modern architects in their applications of new forms, materials, and structural techniques. Many of the toys in the exhibition are made of traditional materials like wood and paper, but there are also examples of new substances like plastic, glass, and even magnetized metal (which allowed the simulation of cantilevers made possible with the advent of reinforced concrete and steel

construction). Toy manufacturers also echoed the modernist fascination with particular building types – the efficient small house, the factory, the skyscraper. Sky-Hy Building Blocks (1920), for example, constructs the kind of set-back skyscraper introduced to New York with the zoning laws of 1916, the first such municipal regulations. Skyline (1990) produces a series of skyscrapers of varying heights that together convey the distinctive image of an upward-looking city centre of the 1980s.

The exhibition presents some twenty examples of international design ranging in date from 1919 to 1993. Drawings, photographs, and books from other CCA collections, that relate to specific toys or have inspired the constructions made with them, provide another link between toy design and the history of architectural ideas. With three exceptions, all works are drawn from the Canadian Centre for Architecture's collections. A boxed set of *Magnet Master* (1947), is provided by its designer Arthur Carrara. Possibly the only surviving copy of Ladislav Sutnar's *Build the Town* (1941-42) is supplied by the designer's son Radoslav. A photograph showing Sutnar's toy *Factory Town* (192226) is borrowed from the Getty Center for the History of Art and the Humanities, Santa Monica. Also included in the exhibition are three recent toys, donated as part of a larger gift to the CCA by their Swiss manufacturer Naef AG, Zeiningen.

The CCA is grateful to Bell Québec and many private donors for their help in acquiring and developing the Collection of Architectural Toys and Games, a collection that permits particularly fresh views on architecture. The exhibition **Toys and the Modernist Tradition**, which will be accompanied by a small catalogue in February 1994, explores early-twentieth-century modernism as it has been considered by toy manufacturers, often with the collaboration of modernist architects. They have produced toys inspired by formalist positions, social issues, and new built forms. The toys in the exhibition invite the viewer to test and explore these issues as they have shaped those who play with them and the cities in which they live.

The exhibition is curated by Howard Shubert, Assistant Curator, Prints and Drawings Collection, and Rosemary Haddad, Associate Librarian.

Throughout the exhibition, play sessions will be held for children from 3 to 12 years of age accompanied by their parents. The youngsters will be able to familiarize themselves with modernist tradition toys and games with the lively help of a special guide, and, along with their parents, will have a chance to explore the possibilities of contemporary toys, some of which will be identical to those on display. Combining observation with hands-on activities, the play sessions have been designed by Suzette Lagacé, educational consultant.

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