

Tredicesima Triennale di Milano — a report by Jack Lenor Larsen

A skeptical, wittily mounted spoof on modern man's "leisure time"

Executive Committee for the 13th Triennale:
Pier Giacomo Castiglioni, architect
Agenore Fabbri, sculptor
Tommaso Ferraris, secretary
Eduardo Vittoria, architect



The two things the Triennale has stood for in the past are 1) a vast product show, and 2) a demonstration of virtuosity in manipulating the spaces of the Palazzo. The Thirteenth Triennale is in no way a product show. The major introductory section done by the Italians presents not a single product, and the special national Italian section shows a few products off-handedly. There have for example been whole fabric pavilions, but this time there are only five fabrics in the whole Italian section. And the countries

in the international section which show products—Germany, for example—subordinate them to some central theme. As much as anything else, however, the Thirteenth Triennale is an open-ended manipulation of interior spaces. The designers have used every device to dramatize the spectator's movement through the sequences of spaces—lights, mirrors, projected images, projected sounds, radical contrasts in texture. Entering one of sculptor Lucio Fontana's spaces after a long walk on mirrored steps, you find carpet not only thick and spongy but undulating. Visual impact has been combined with thematic imagery, visual puns, and sound tracks. In one sequence you turn a corner and are in total darkness as a result of the way spaces are arranged with light blocked out at both ends. You have to find your way out of this.

On purpose the great hall and grand double stair tier have been destroyed. Instead every inch of space is employed to do a job. As in the Victorian house each small room has its mood, its function, its message—a subjective, romantic approach to the use of space. This is not the light, ordered space of modern architecture, where space is static, as water in a tub. Instead space floods and moves here as through a series of irrigation canals. In some places you rush through, in others you are almost stopped dead. Much of the time you are moving up or down through different levels. You never get the total picture, nor sense the vast volume, nor even see your way clearly among the mirrored stairs. No space is transparent. Neither is it skeletal, with a structural system to define it. How this structure was put together remains a mystery hidden beneath a silvery skin. The experience is a sensual one—and a romp—fast-paced, sophisticated, satirical.

For satire is the key to the whole treatment of the Thirteenth Triennale's theme—Leisure Time. A cynical attitude is always alluded to, though never explicitly stated, in a technique where visual, literary, and auditory communication is combined in a flashing collage of projected visual and aural symbols. Voices and lettering in little rooms opening off the main stair tell you of your need for leisure, but imply that is an illusion. An advancing then receding image of Marilyn Monroe implies that our utopian enjoyments are wholly vicarious. A room of black spiderwebs spun across mirrors in jewel tones implies that though technological progress apparently increases leisure time, this too may be an illusion. These little tubular rooms off the main silver stairway punctuate the main rising space and give it accent. In addition to the visual liveliness of the experience there is a lively sound quality. Silvery surfaces—metals and mirrors—are accompanied by silvery sounds—gongs, chimes, rustles, and whirring.

The team of collaborators which produced this almost anti-architectural experience included some of Milan's well-known architects, as well as writers and stage designers. The introductory area is credited to Dr. Umberto Eco, writer, and Vittorio Gregotti, who collaborated in directing it; and again architect Gregotti, Lodovico Meneghetti, and Giotto Stoppino, who with set designer Luciano Damiani designed and installed it. Collaborating with them were Massimo Vignelli in charge of graphics, and painters Enrico Baj, Lucio Fontana, Luciano del Pezzo, Roberto Crippa, Fabio Mauri, and Achille Perilli. Architect Livio Castiglioni was responsible for the projected sound sequence.

Entry stair labyrinth, mirror and silver—



Doors to nowhere in mirrored 6'x6' room.



Free time, a mirrored spiderweb labyrinth

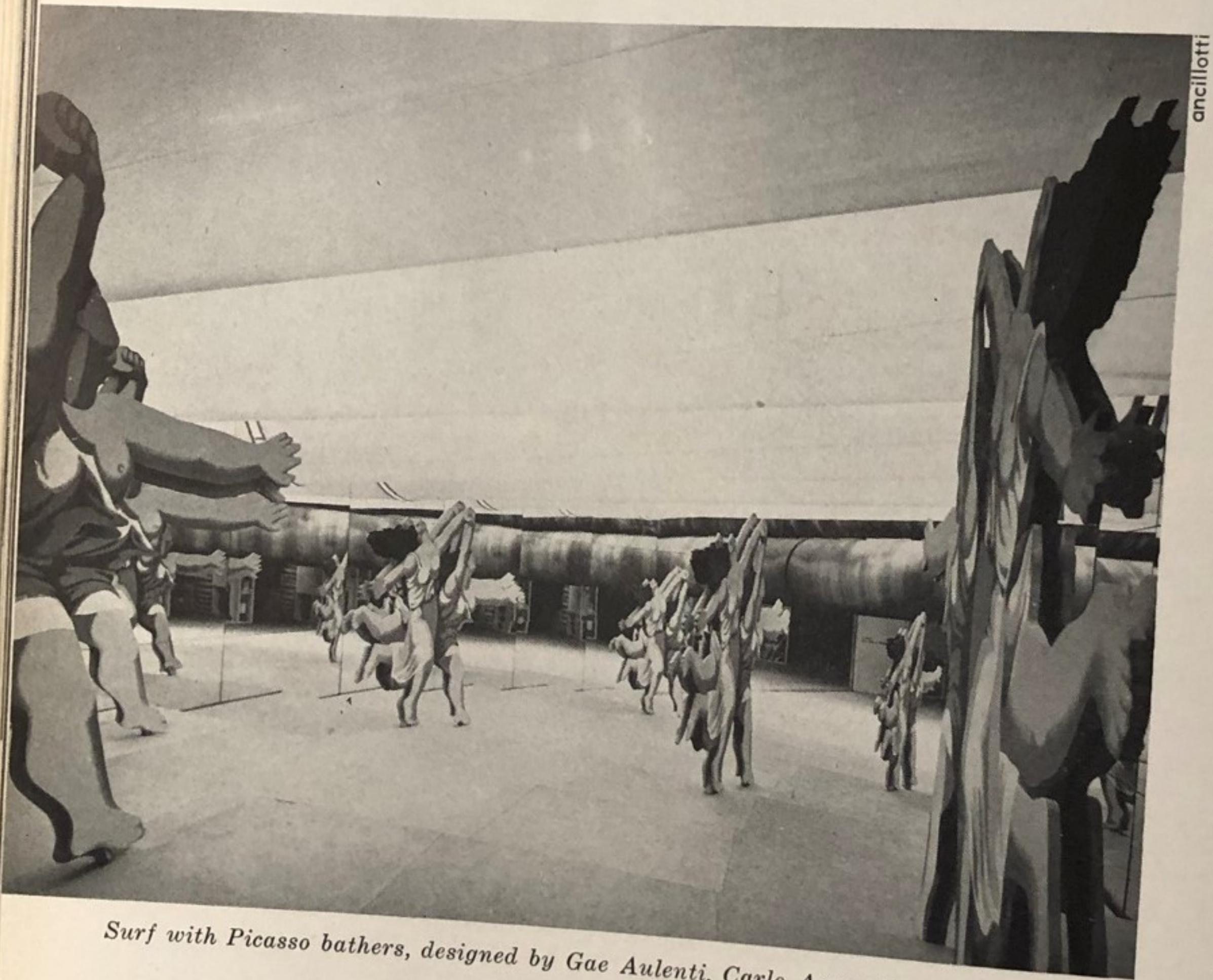


Newsprint man works in his "spare" time



Italy, continued: the sea... sports equipment... the coast transformed

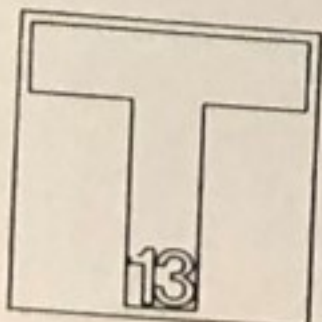
Having demolished the spectator's illusion that today's spare time can bring him the refreshment of spirit synonymous with the leisure of the past, the Italian team gets down to specific problems in the second sequence of Italian spaces. The joys which nature offers man are symbolized in what appears to be thousands of Picasso bathers rushing towards oncoming breakers. Actually there are only a few pairs of the larger-than-life-size cut-out figures; mirrors multiply them. The surf crashing down is achieved by waves painted on turning rollers with convincing sound effects. Following a route under this "sea" the spectator roams through a whole catacomb—endless rooms—of Italian-made leisure-time paraphernalia ranging from butterfly nets to ski clothes, originally abstracted by a coat of white paint but later presented clean when the Italian manufacturers protested. The next sequence illustrates the original balance between man and nature; this is done chiefly through the sheer harmony of rather empty concentric spaces. How man has destroyed this harmony by grotesquely over-urbanizing the Italian seashore is then illustrated in a crazy-quilt of photomurals on walls and ceilings. Other studies on the connection between leisure and city planning are presented in Italian exhibits scattered among foreign exhibits on the second floor (Continued overleaf)



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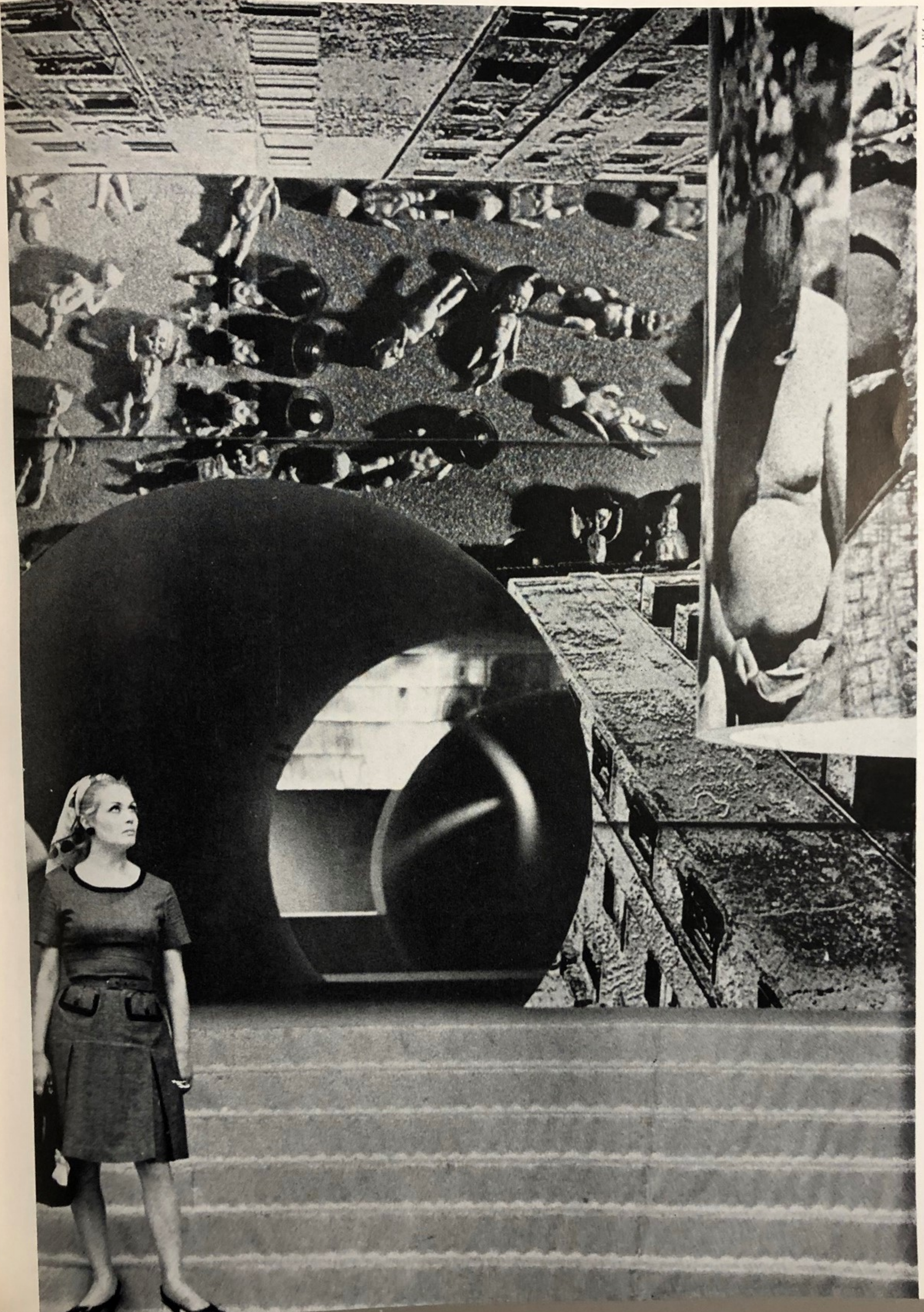
Italian seacoast after invasion, by Gae Aulenti, Carlo Aymonino, Stefano Paciello

Surf with Picasso bathers, designed by Gae Aulenti, Carlo Aymonino, Stefano Paciello





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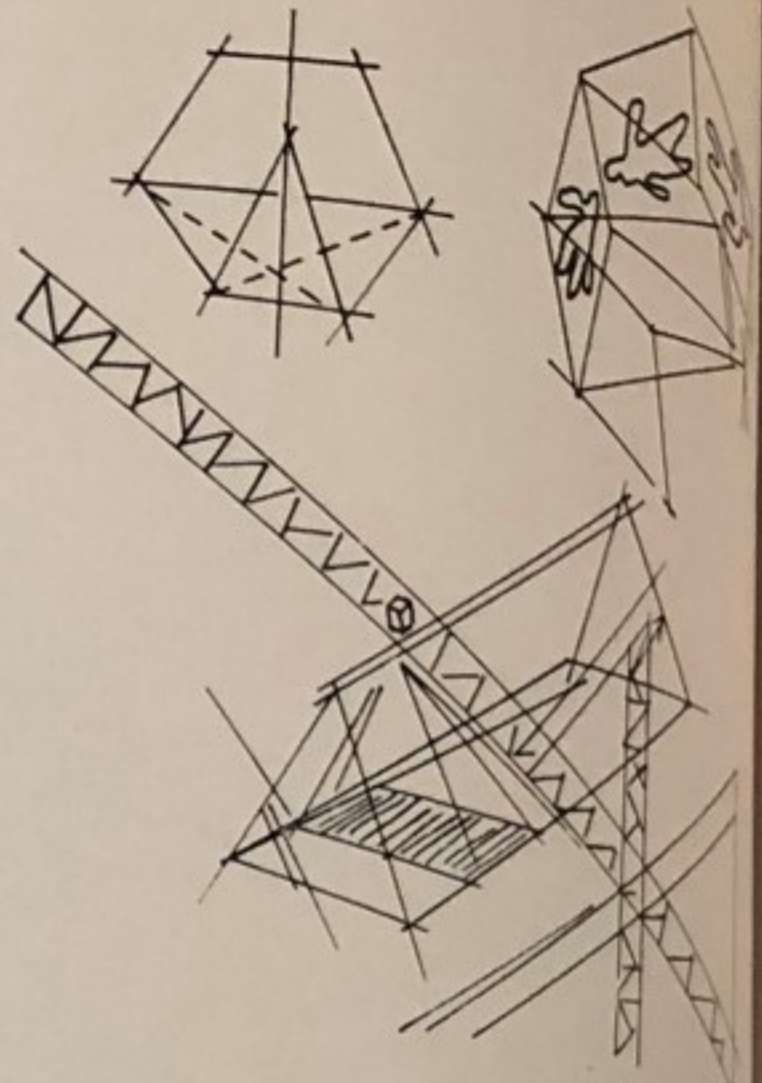
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(THE ITALIAN SECTION, CONCLUDED)

that analyze and comment on leisure in relation to industry, to entertainment, and to the amount of green area available in various types of urban communities. These areas all have the same orange baseboard and corrugated tin roof finished in orange. One is a grove of poles supporting murals; in another the pictures revolve, producing combinations which are never repeated; another is a white maze of opaque and transparent planes. The section on green areas consists of drawings and maps on floor-to-ceiling size canvases mounted on tracks so that the viewer can manipulate the panels himself.

The kaleidoscopic room (below) hammers home the theme that our leisure is wrapped in the same package as other romantic illusions which films, TV, and the press foster about the mundane middle-class existence we lead. Here architects Gregotti, Brivio, Meneghetti, and Stoppino have dramatized the illusory multiplication of space and people in what is actually a mirrored room triangular in section. Entrance and exit are small triangular doors at opposite sides of the two end walls.

Also in the Italian section are some Italian industrial products (below): a strong, inexpensive, comfortable, tubular metal chair lacquered to any desired color; a collapsible, leather-slung aluminum chair that folds into its own compact styrofoam case; a clip-on lamp; many forms of chests of drawers with the drawers opening in four directions; an inexpensive, lightweight, mass-produced library stepladder.



Fewer people and less space than you think in the kaleidoscopic room by Gregotti, Brivio, Meneghetti and Stoppino.



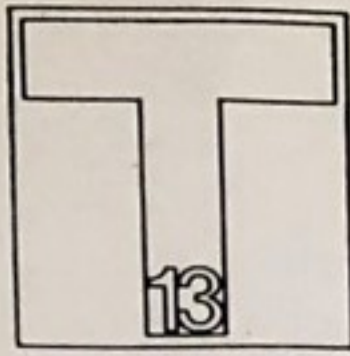
"Poltronova" chair by Gae Aulenti made by Agliana.



Folding chair designed by anonymous architect, made by Palini, Milan.



Zanuso lamp, Boeri chest from Tecnoform; Albin-Helg steps from Poggi.



The Triennale in the park

The open-air "Triennale al Parco" usually scattered all around the Palazzo, is this time concentrated in an area in one of the island strips between two roads that lead into the park. It is connected to the Palazzo's second floor by a triangular steel footbridge that leads out across two roads to drop into a shaded ravine. A long straight walk enters the several sections, which are divided by high walls pierced by narrow doors. Within the complex are five country houses; three are Italian prefabs, one is Canadian, and the fifth is an Alpine (Trentino) chalet refitted as a weekend retreat.

The prefabs are well designed for economy and easy upkeep, have such practical amenities as sliding shutters. But after the kookie, sophisticated handling of the Palazzo exhibitions, their interiors seem mundane, though they are decent



(TRIENNALE IN THE PARK, CONTINUED)

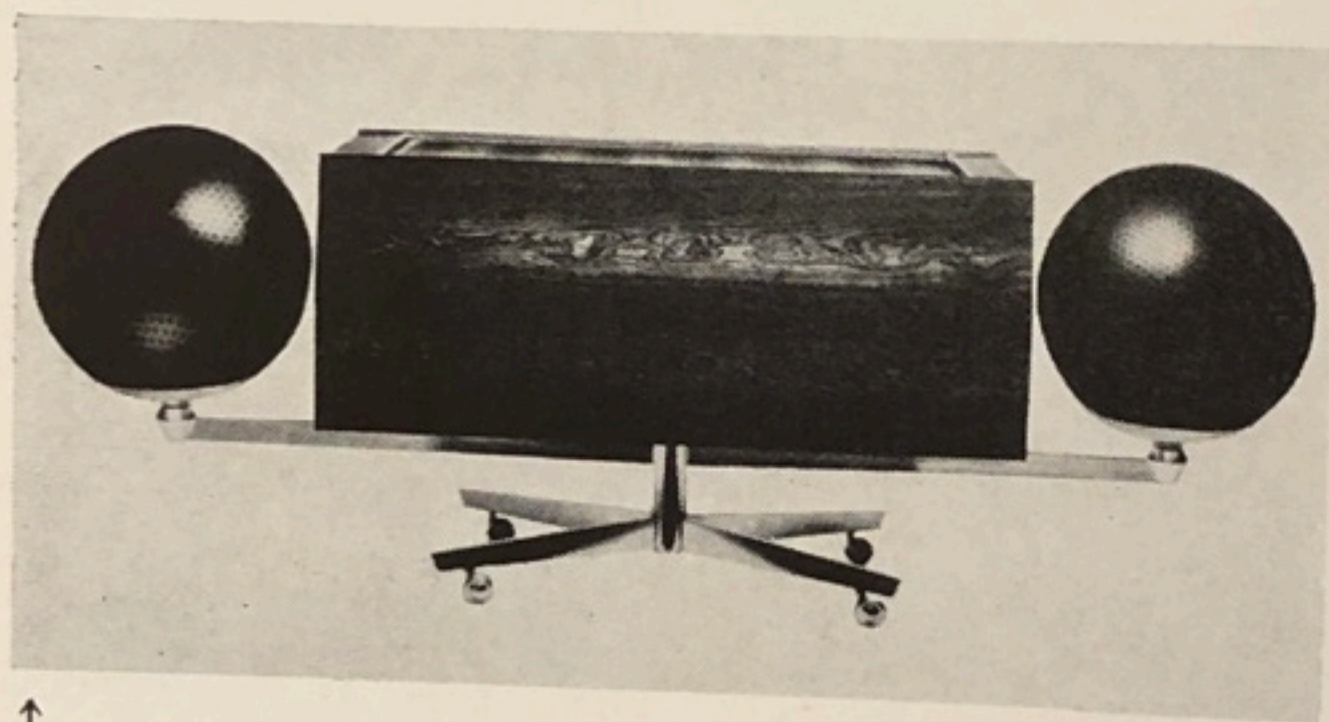
enough practical items for use now. Some excitement, however, is generated by two inflated domes for temporary shelter—to enclose a swimming pool for example. The same electric ventilator that inflates the shelter also heats or cools it. As an interior space it is very pleasant, without boundaries, corners, or structural grids. It has a wonderful light penetration. The reinforcing in the skin itself is decorative and serves to break the glare.

The other success is the "caravan" by Clive Latimer and his students. It is a small trailer whose four sides fold down to become floors of additional rooms. With a minimum tow load it achieves a five-room vacation house. All its furnishings and equipment—chairs, lavatories etc.—were specially designed for an airy space and light spirit instead of the stuffy, crammed look characteristic of the elephantine, almost unmaneuverable American trailers.

Photomurals printed directly into sensitized fresco—permanent and weather-proof—were the news in the Trentino section's big court. The heated pool, boats, and garden furniture only demonstrated the United States' relative superiority in this department.

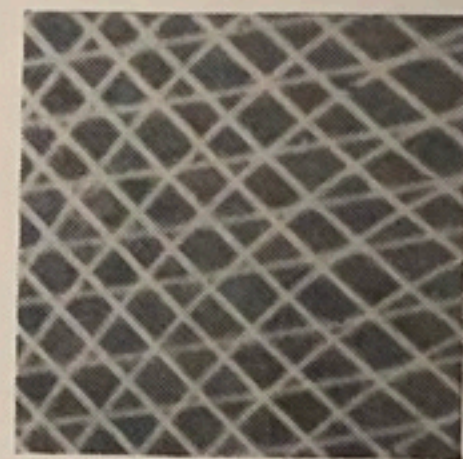


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Inflatable plastic dome made by Plasteco Milano is translucent.

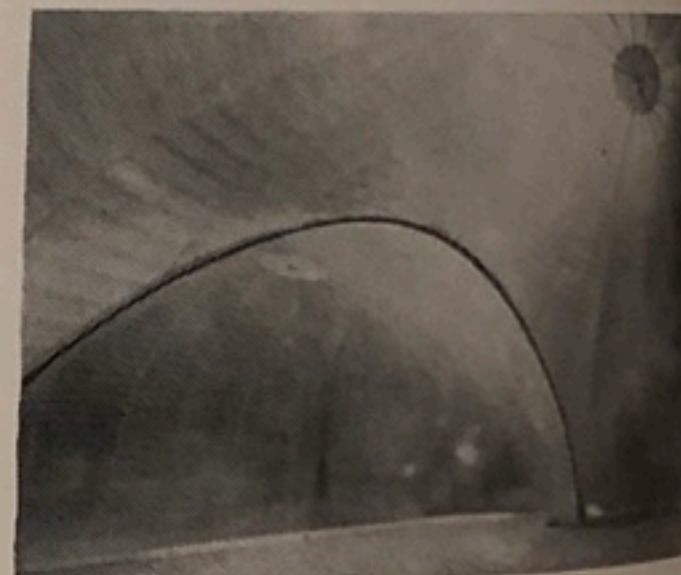


↑
Clairtone stereo in Canadian vacation house gives concert hall sound from round speakers.

British trailer by Clive Latimer and students of Hornsey, London School of Art spreads out under canvas, using its own walls as floors for what grows into an airy five-room house.

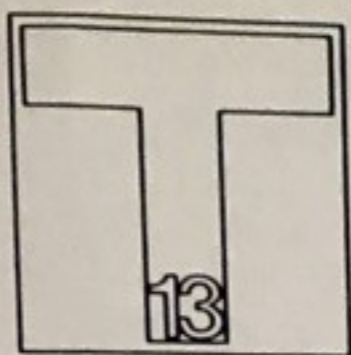


Close-up of reinforced dome skin.

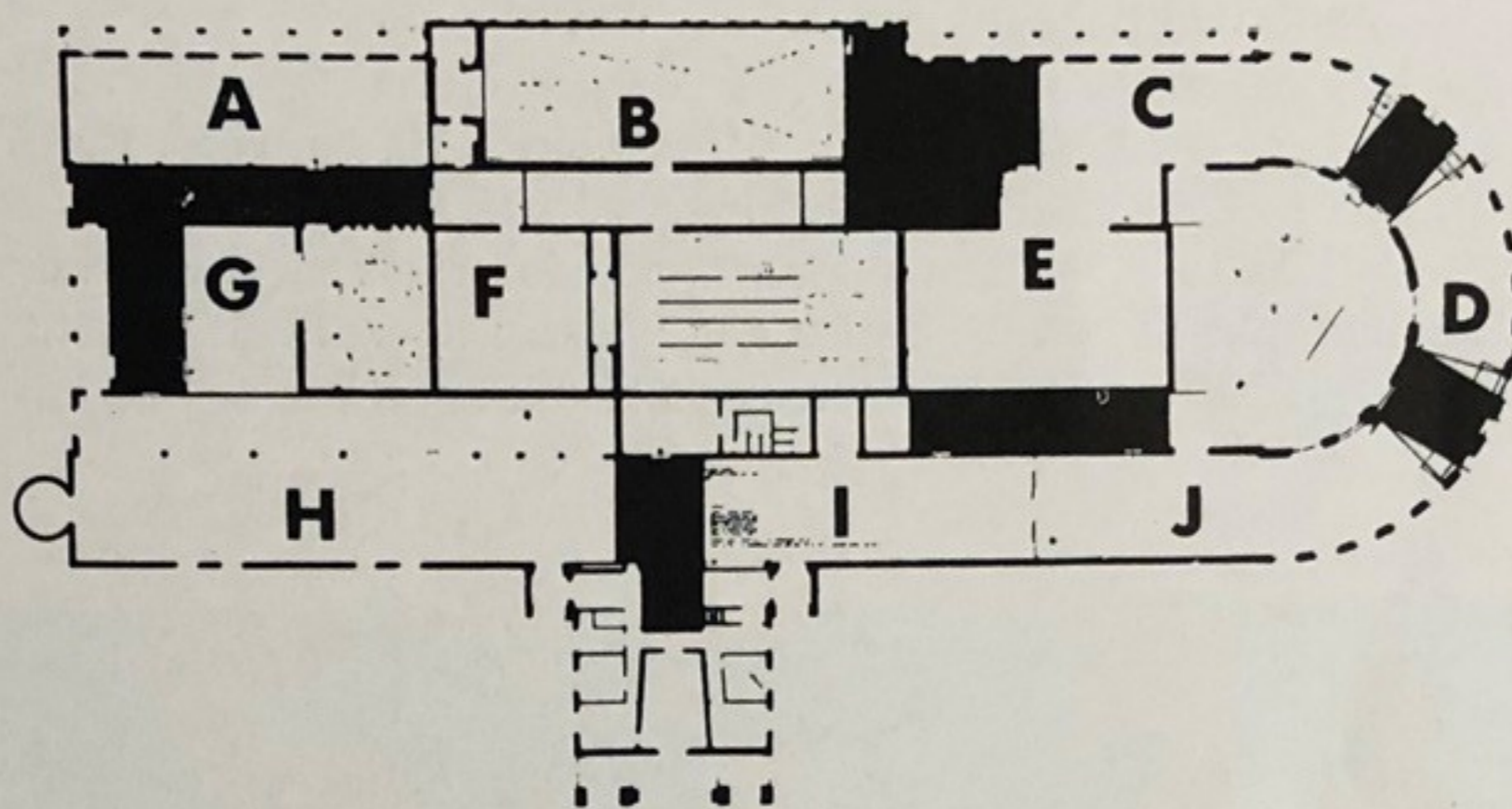


Interior of dome. By stitching together special shapes can be made

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FOREIGN SECTIONS AT THE TRIENNALE



KEY TO PLAN OF UPPER FLOOR: Black areas are Italian leisure exhibitions distributed among foreign exhibitions. A Germany; B International; C France; D U.S.A.; E France; F Finland; G Yugoslavia; H Brazil; I Belgium; J Mexico. There are other foreign spaces on the lower floor.

from the national sections. They are most definitely missed. The competition of the New York World's Fair for talent and appropriated funds is undoubtedly a factor in this defection. In Scandinavia there was a quarrel with the "Leisure Time" theme; the manufacturers who are partial supporters for the exhibits did not find it down their alley.

A word about the sections not illustrated in this report:

Mexico's large space, which is next to the American section, is definitely the best showing ever made by that country. It is a comprehensive report of recent social developments, hung on the leisure theme peg, and is well mounted by architects Alejandro Prieto Posada, Luis Lessur, and Manuel Mangino. It is not, however, a valid Triennale exhibition simply because it is not a design exhibition.

Perhaps because of its concern with the Lausanne Fair within its own borders, Switzerland—usually an ambitious Triennale exhibitor—has outfitted its small space simply and rather anonymously as a seminar room illustrated only with brief text and photographic references to the Recreational Center at Zurich, prepared under the direction of the Federal Department of the Interior with the collaboration of the Federal Commission of Applied Arts; architect Hans Fiskli was commissioner and designer.

Holland usually has a fairly large, chock-full exhibition, but this year its stand was so unambitious that it must be classified as an also-ran. Its theme, little related to the Triennale's, was the reclamation of new land from the sea and the transformation of the landscape. Dutch commissioner was J. M. C. Boks, and designers of the exhibition were architects H. and L. Hartsuyker-Curijel.

Great Britain has a bigger and more important exhibition than usual—actually the biggest of the national sections. It is complex, comprised half of works of art and half of products. England has also provided the Triennale with its largest and most serious contingent of foreign spectators, particularly bus-loads of students. Britain's commissioner was Paul Reilly, its vice commissioner J. K. Hanna; the installation was designed by architect Theo Crosby. Paul Reilly, a painter, has used natural tongue-and-groove pine boards in a crisp, fresh way, painting bold polychrome symbols that look like geometric totems directly on the faceted interior walls. The space itself is like the inside of a huge faceted polyhedron. To fill it thousands of objects are needed—hunting horns, cricket wickets—all the traditional English sporting paraphernalia massed (or disposed of?) in a minimal area. In another gallery is a huge hand-knotted mural—a rug that wraps three walls. Still another British section is paved with lots of photographs of Britons at leisure that resemble movie stills or documentaries. The total effect in the ample galleries is rather cozy and lacks unity and continuity; obviously it expresses several voices on the selection committee.

If the United States and Brazil are new names in the Palazzo, Japan, Denmark, Sweden, Norway, Spain, Poland, and Czechoslovakia are familiar names absent

By stitching
shapes can be acti

Foreign sections: Finland, Yugoslavia, Brazil

Finland has presented a smaller, less ambitious, and less expensive space than ever before. The designers, however, have expressed the same taste and clarity of concept on a lower budget. A dozen superb items of sports equipment are shown against atmospheric bays of photo murals. Arctic austerity is expressed in a snowy black and white birch forest and rock beach. Except for the wood there is no color at all. Poetry comes from round forms and the arrangement of the exhibits in relation to the murals. Architect Annti Nurmesniemi designed Finland's space in 1960. His wife and collaborator Vuoko was the original Marimekko designer.

Yugoslavia has made a single statement about every-day leisure, focusing on common folk. The technique was to fragment photo murals and paste them on staggered two-by-fours to achieve depth and uncanny movement. Factory workers twist, peasants dance. Architects Bernardo Bernardi and Vjenceslav Richter have used only pine two-by-fours for framework and floors. This is the most flawless (though not most momentous) statement at the Triennale.

In the Brazilian space architects Lucio and Maria Elisa Costa, Sergio Porto, and Homero Leite have set up an elaborate space frame hung with banners. From the space frame are hung Brasil's traditional hammocks. The hammocks fold up around the Triennale visitors to give them some privacy for their siestas. They work just fine. Big photographs of notable sports and places are excellent. Brazil, a newcomer, has almost equaled the Italians' tongue-in-cheek approach to the leisure theme.



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Brazil



Finland

Yugoslavia

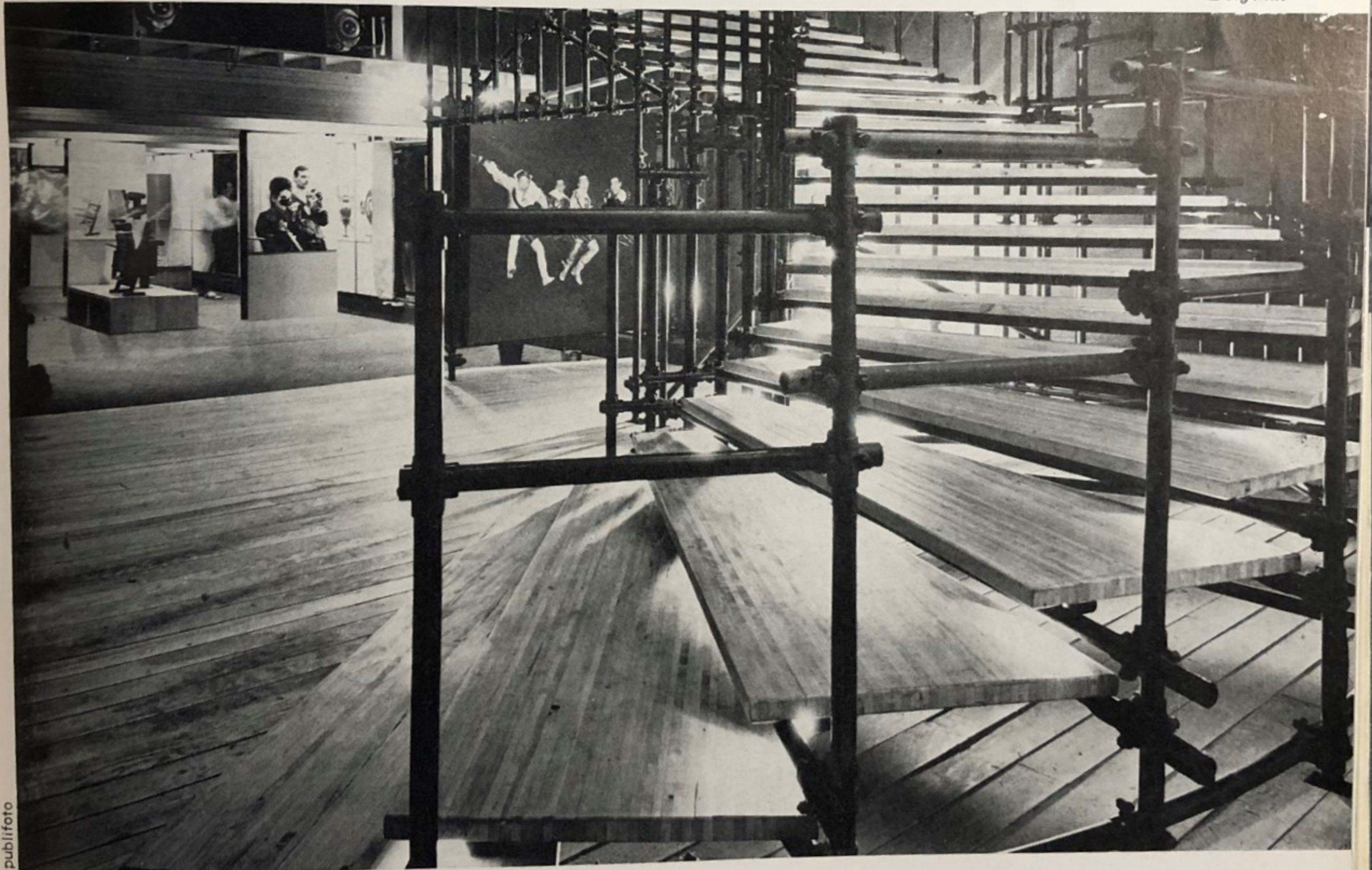
Belgium and Germany—two theaters

Both Germany and Belgium happened to select the theater as a theme; that theme dominates each space. Each performed in its traditional manner—Belgium expensive, elegant, if anything overdesigned; Germany imposing and monumental.

The Belgian approach to theatrical performance is exploratory. Designer Edouard Mahillon and architects Jean Faes, Constant Brodzki, Henri Debras, and Donald Sturbelle have built two small theaters. Both make maximum use of light, projection, automated backdrops, puppetry. Seating design and furnishings are more matter-of-fact. Extravagant expenditures of time and money have produced some interesting effects, concepts, ideas, but the space comes off taut, dark, heavy. It is however the only two-leveled national section. Photo below shows staircase which incorporates over-all steel pipe and pine structural system.

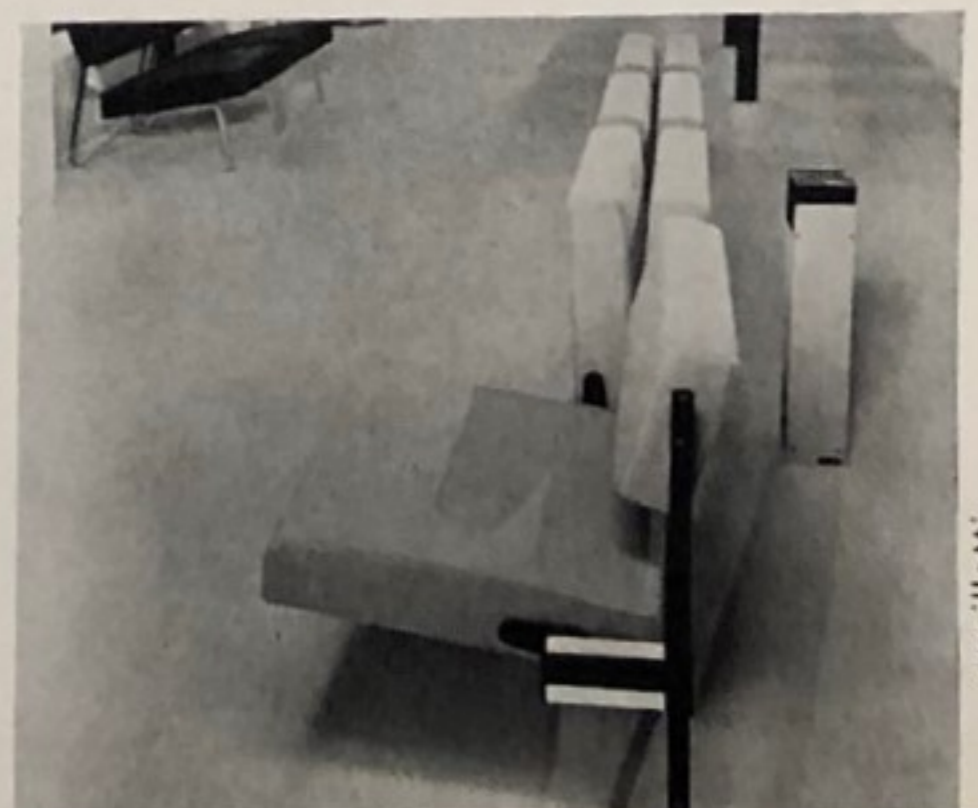
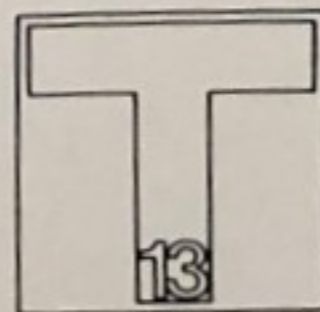
The Germans have taken a huge space and emphasized its height to create a Parthenon sensation. Elements are superimposed upon elements, leaving no stone or display device unturned. Revolving white columns are surrounded by boxes containing models of theater sets in lighted niches, fronted in turn by graphic boards and furniture. A Miesian effect is given by the monumental scale, and the furniture, too, is reminiscent. The objects are most interesting, including spectacular examples of the goldsmith's art, a stately modern clavichord designed and made by Rainer Schütze, a functionalist ashtray by Klaus Koch, and several systems of theatre seats including Gustav Wegener's illustrated single-pedestal model.

Belgium

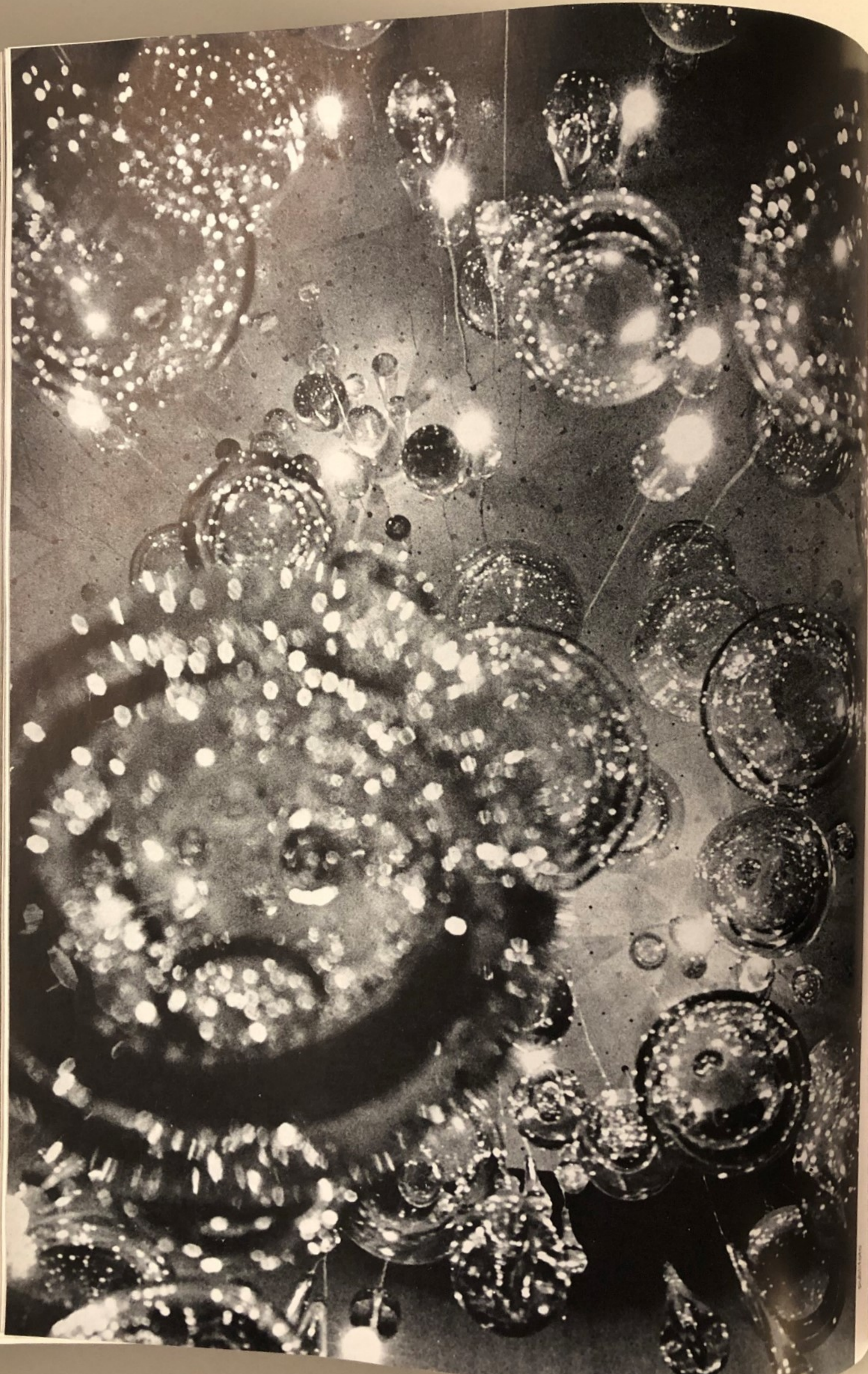


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German theater seat



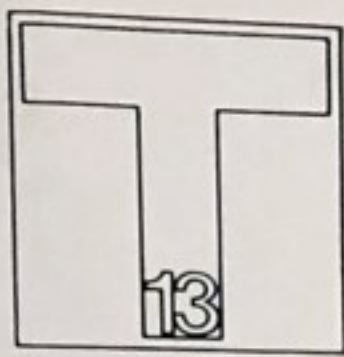
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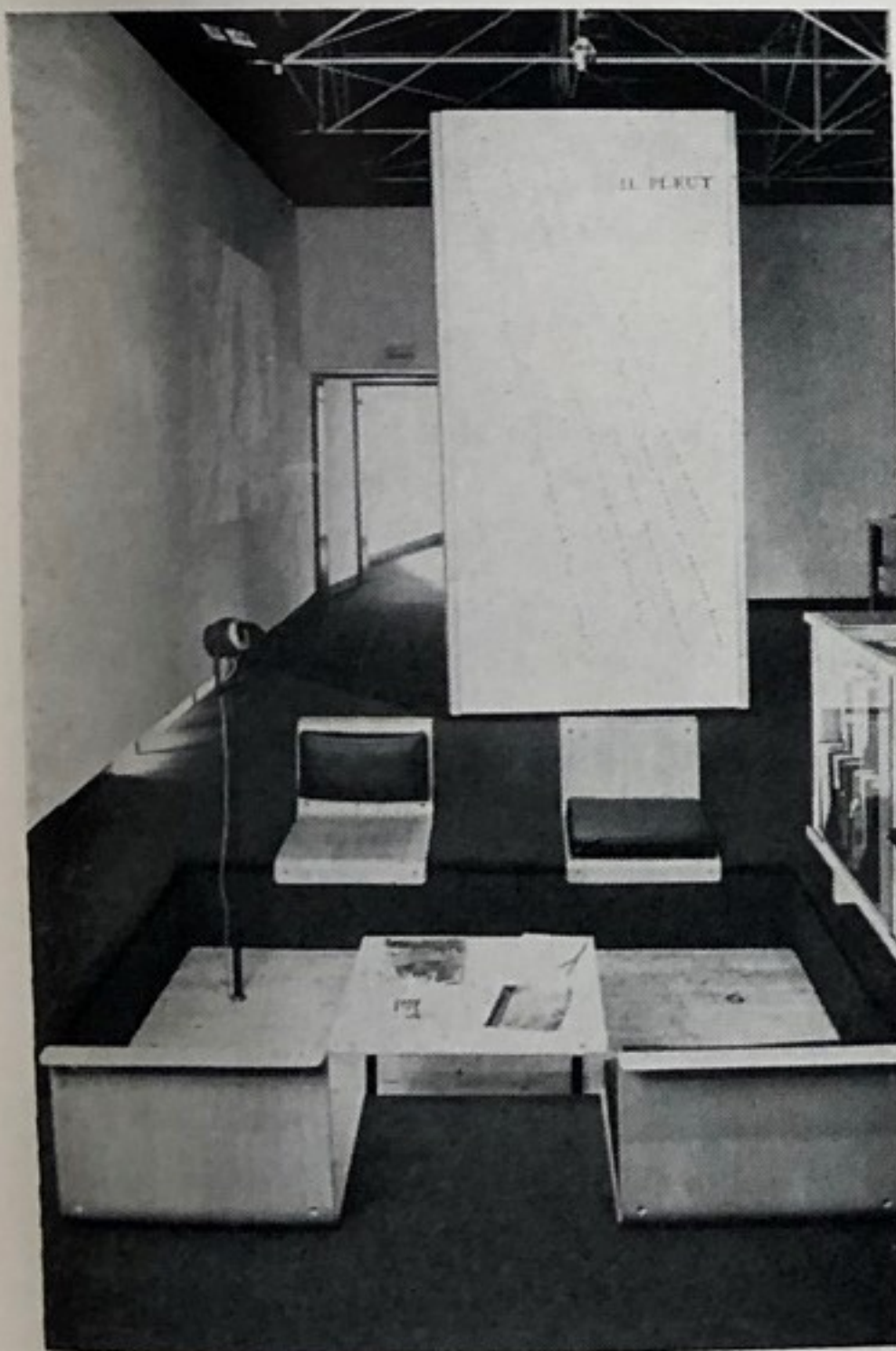
Foreign sections: Austria, France



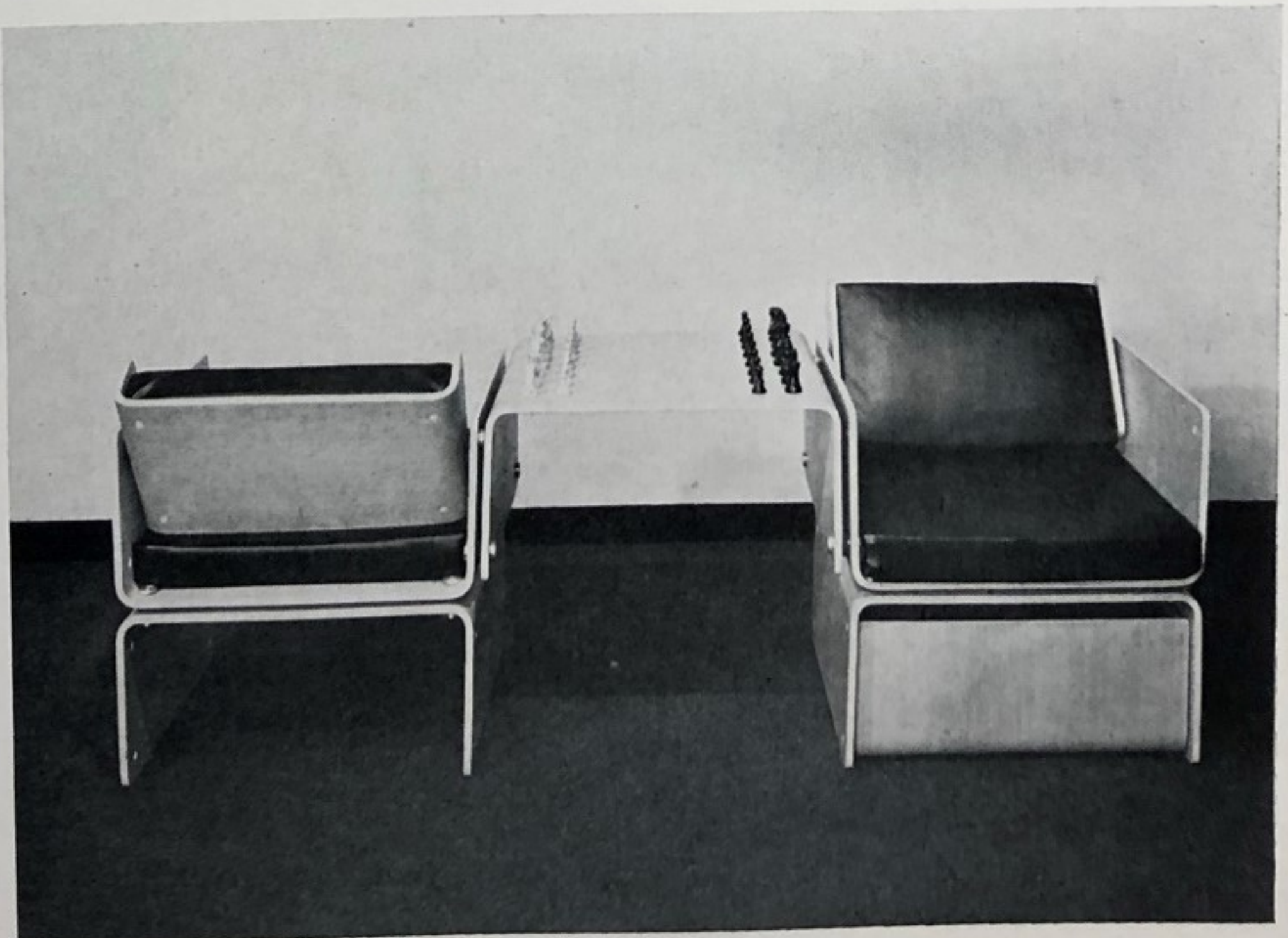
Austria follows her traditional Triennale format, showing a broad selection of designs—again urbane, precious, handcrafted, completely tasteful. Repeated circles of display cases unify disparate objects but also upstage them. Globular tear-drop crystal chandelier was almost the only glass or crystal in the Triennale. Exhibition design and installation were by architect Fritz Goffitzer.

The large French space includes what they call a *culture house*, which is a prototype community library equipped with elaborate sound systems, multiple projection, and a small auditorium. The auditorium is a bare box populated with pedestals screwed into the floor. The reading and listening room comes off better, largely because of the successful lounge pits. They actually work; most of the time they contain fifteen or twenty people reading and/or listening. Roger Legrand's molded knockdown modular plywood furniture is used throughout for flexibility and an effective simplicity. Installation and design were by artistic director Pierre Faucheux and architect Michel Jausseraud.

French lounge pit (below) with charcoal carpet, natural light wood furniture, white walls, black leather upholstery, has space frame used for both mounting of projection equipment and as a projection surface. Changing projections (note one on wall) provide change in color and decor. At right: pedestal and plywood furniture by Legrand.



3 photos: ancillotti



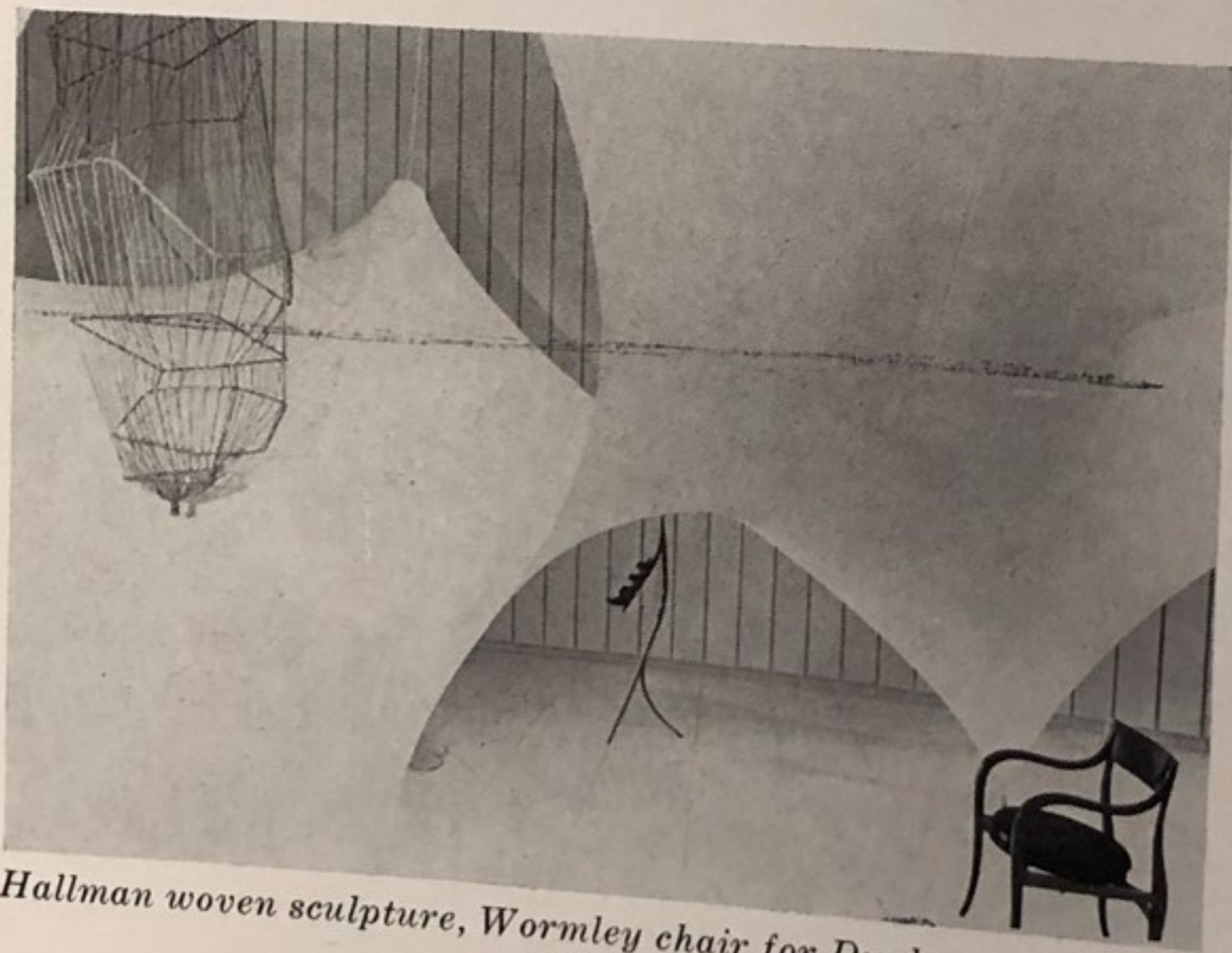
←Lobmeyer crystal chandelier, a down-pour of teardrops from Austria's ceiling.

The United States at the Triennale

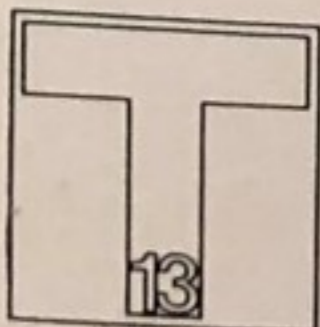
One tries to speak modestly about one's own children. The author of INTERIORS' report on the Triennale was collaborating designer of the American exhibition, working closely with architect Charles Forberg in developing the space, and personally installing the exhibits. He was also an ex officio member of the selection committee, with Edgar Kaufmann, Jr., President of the Committee for American Participation in the Triennale, Inc., Mildred Constantine, Associate Curator of the Department of Architecture and Design at the Museum of Modern Art, and myself. However, the world press has already delivered its verdict: the U. S. space, privately financed and costing a mere forty thousand dollars, was the best in the foreign section. European visitors sat right down on our kookiest seats, even the garden stools made of polyethylene balls and the stoneware ones by Karen Karnes, and knew, without checking the catalog, what our road signal and modern music stand were for.—Ed.

In one sense the United States exhibit must be considered our statement not for 1964 but for 1957 or 1960 — in other words for Triennales in which we did not make an appearance. That is why the U.S. is so different from the other exhibitors. We have not yet lived through these experiences of an explicit visual shell with explicit products within it; other countries already have, for two or ten Triennales, and are on to something else. The only reason why we don't seem ten or twelve years behind the times is that our space is completely advanced in concept, and for the most part our selected exhibits are ahead of the market.

Some observers could assume that we're not with it—fuddy-duddy and serious while everybody else at the Triennale is having such a ball. But our ideas may not be dismissed either, because they are not only a retrospect of past Triennales but a foretaste of the next Triennale. In a way what is curious is that our approach is romantic—in the lyrical quality of the canopy and the interpretation of its spaces — and too, in the quality of many of the exhibits. They are not designs for an industrialized democracy but are single expressions of one individual. All of this about the American space is objective, and it is serious. Other things about the American space: It is serene, imbued with a general feeling of confidence, optimism, and hope. Whereas the other sections of the Triennale are generally dark, noisy, cavernous, and often chaotic, the U. S. space is light, bright, and clean.



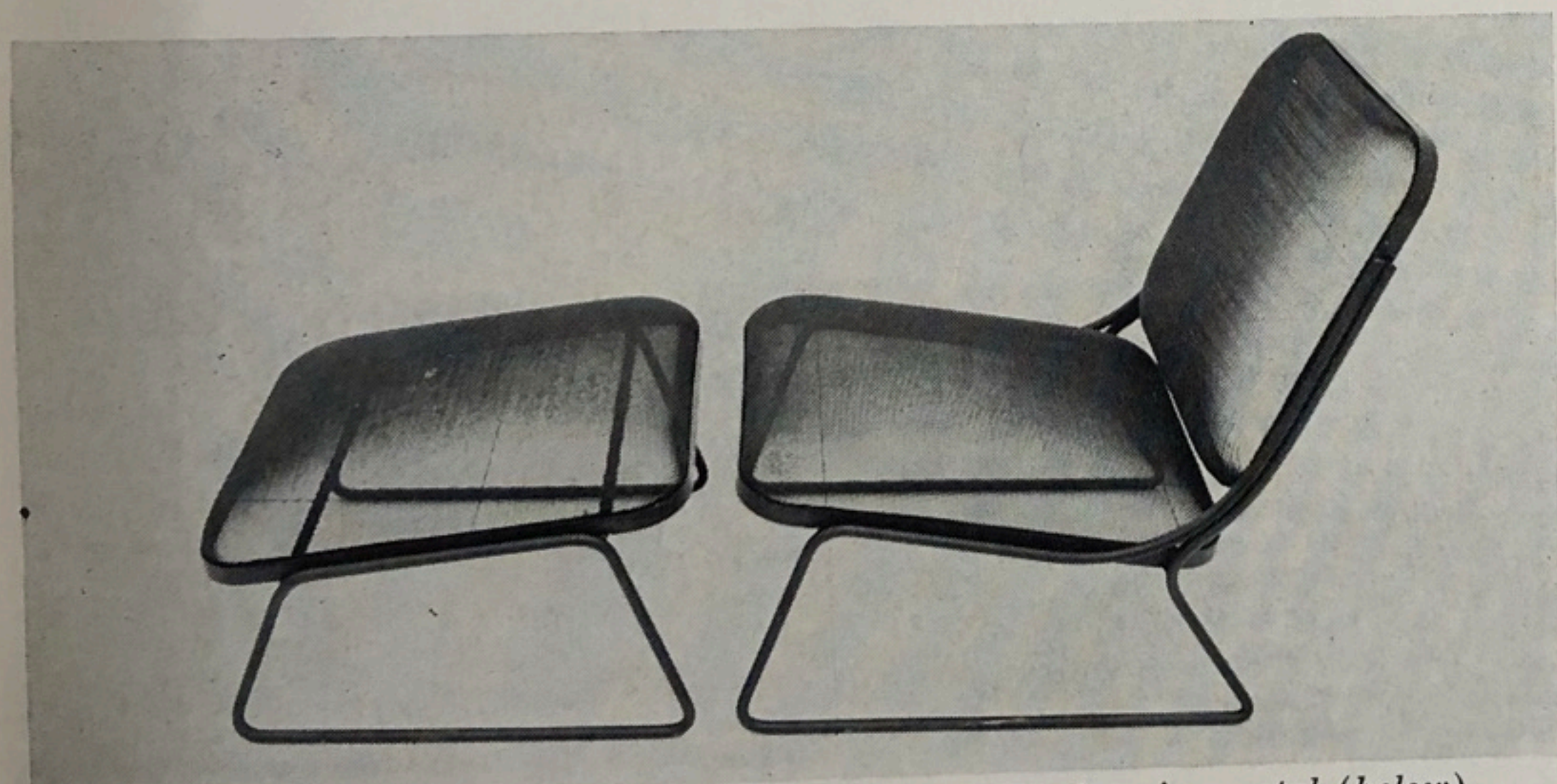
Hallman woven sculpture, Wormley chair for Dunbar



Eva Zeisel chair, knitted Mary Walker Philips cover

Some of the objects chosen to exhibit were selected not as the best solutions to a given problem but because they suggest a new approach; this is particularly true of the plastic bubble and stoneware seating. Fabrics — otherwise scarce at the Triennale — dominate the American section. We have about a dozen pieces of furniture (in the loosest interpretation of the term) but about thirty fabrics including fabric sculptures, and six light sources. In our decorative art the prominent items are the freely blown crystal of Harvey Littleton, the cast silver and bronze of Dorothy Dehner and William Underhill, the bas reliefs of Tauno Kauppi and Glen Michaels, the compression structures and sculptural models of Kenneth Snelson.

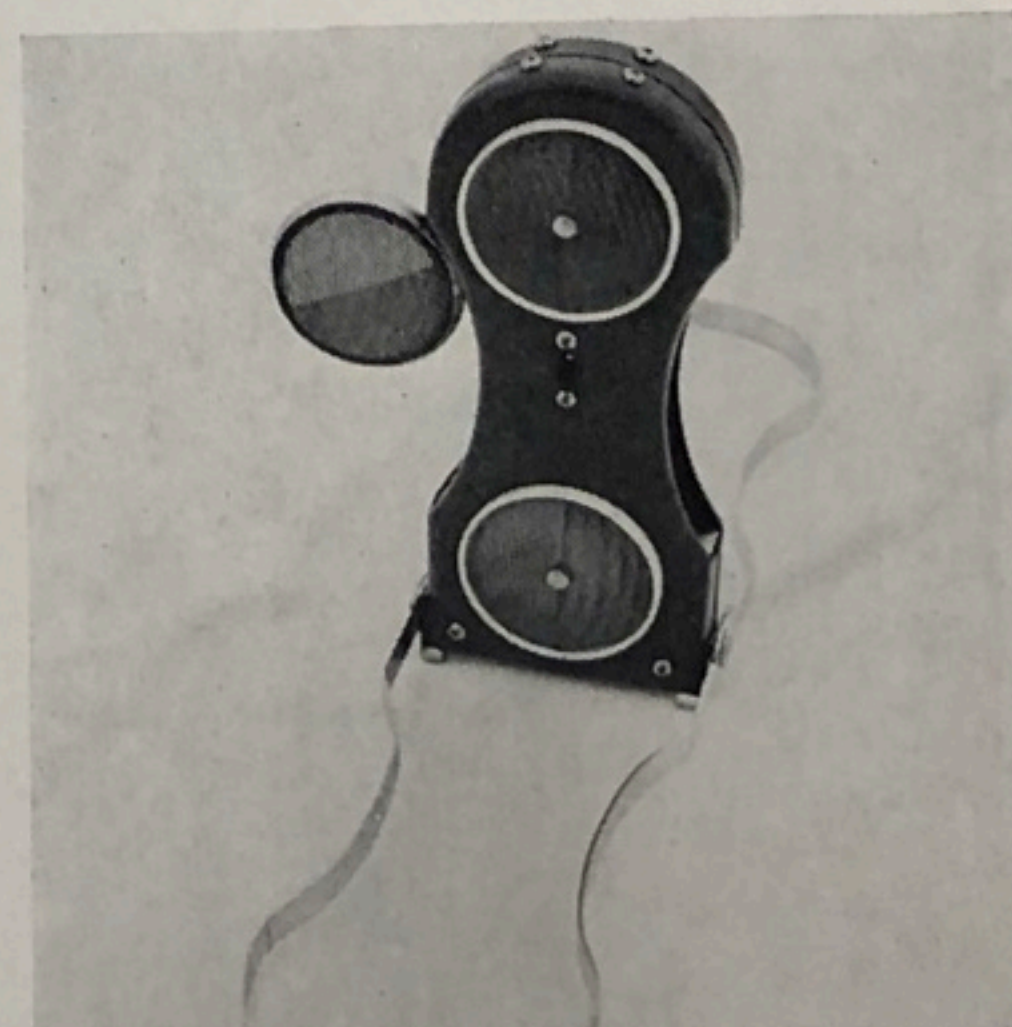
Some of the examples of industrial design seem in the spirit of the space itself—clean, light, disposable, synthetic, e.g. the Tensor and Lampette lamps, polyethylene stools, picnic paraphernalia. Knitted fabrics suggest an approach to upholstery that entails no cutting and can be pulled off like a sweater for cleaning. The resilient wire fabric on the Avard chair, simultaneously cushioning and upholstery, provided a comfortable seat. The American surfboard was popular with visitors, the General Fireproofing stacking chair popular with dealers. Edward Wormley's chair for Dunbar, like the paintings of Picasso's classic period, seems classic without being so, has romantic graceful curves, quite an original structure.



Avard (Darrell Landrum) chaise (above) and Harvey Littleton's crystal (below)



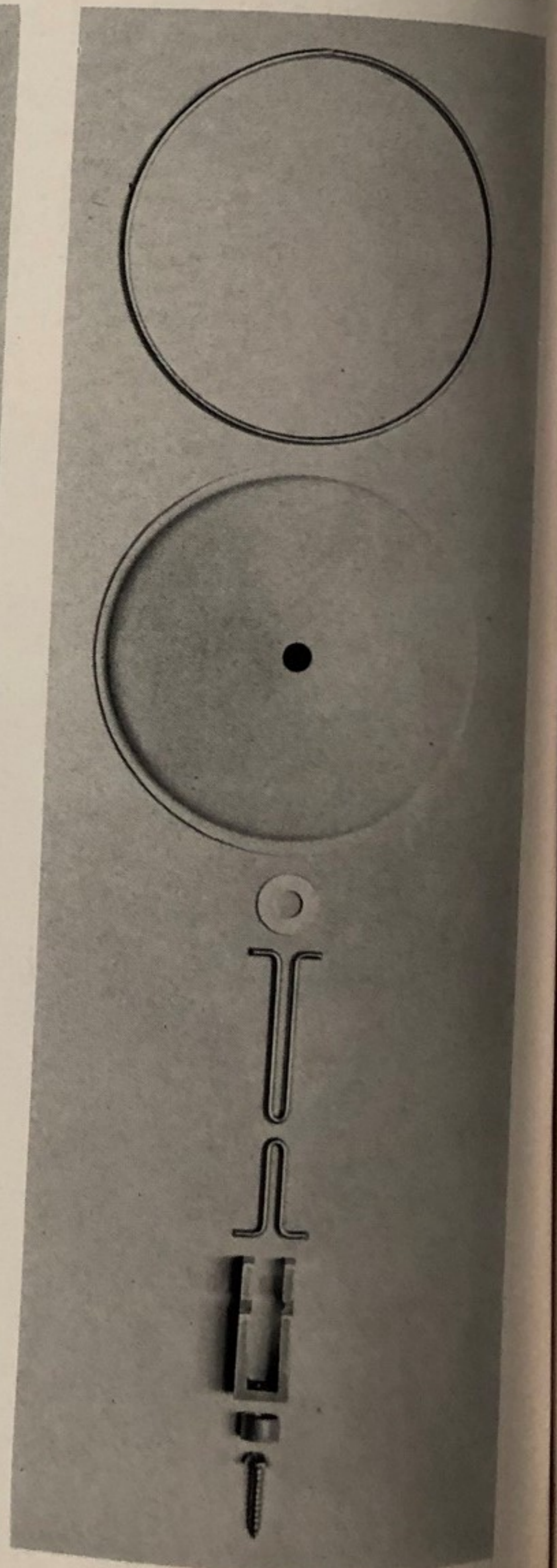
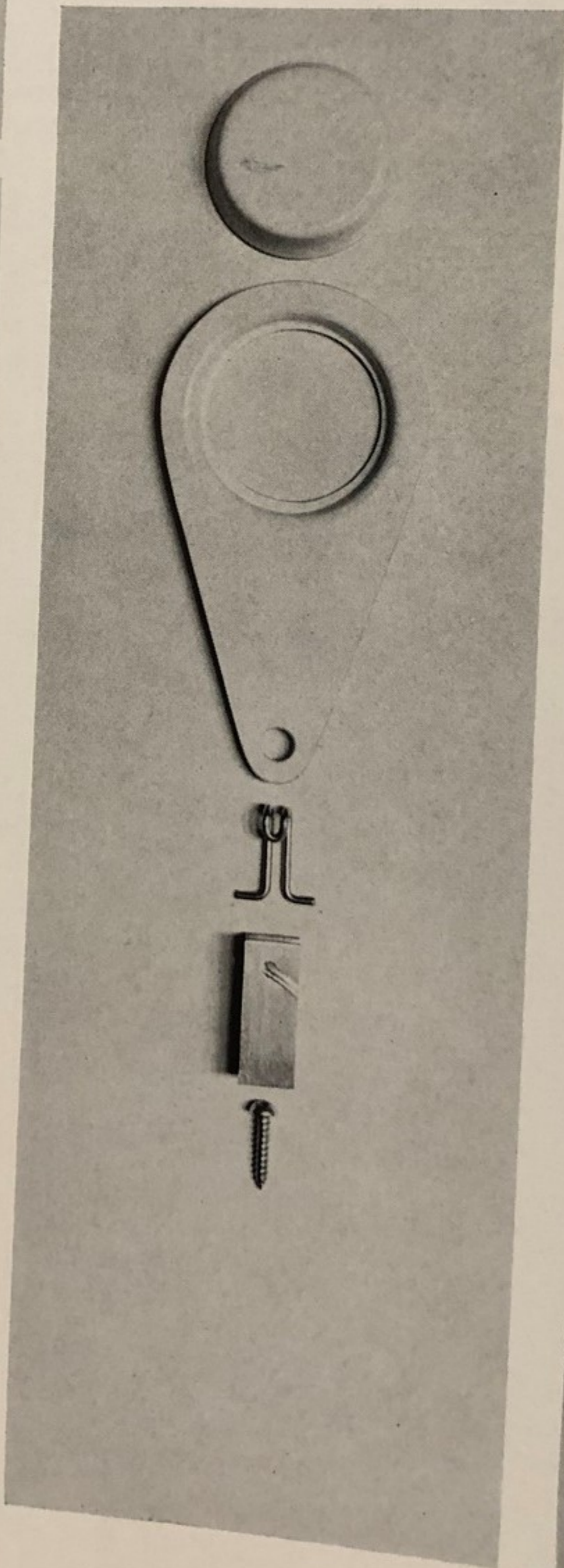
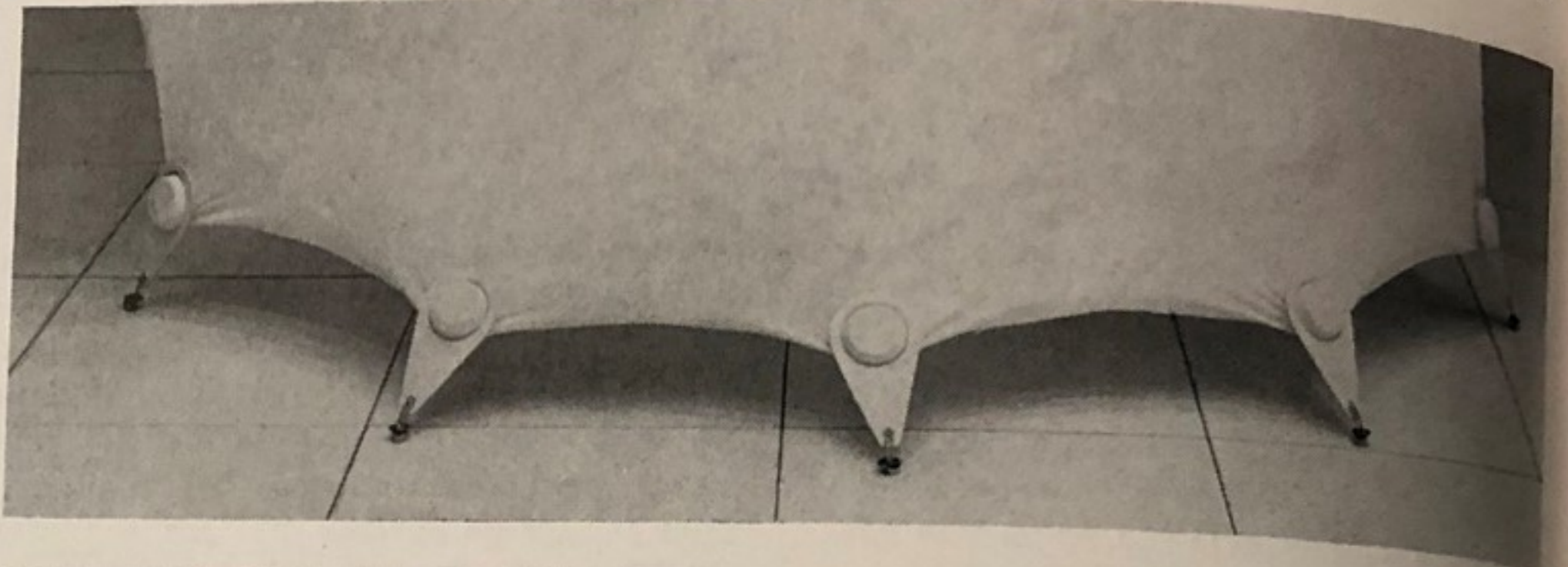
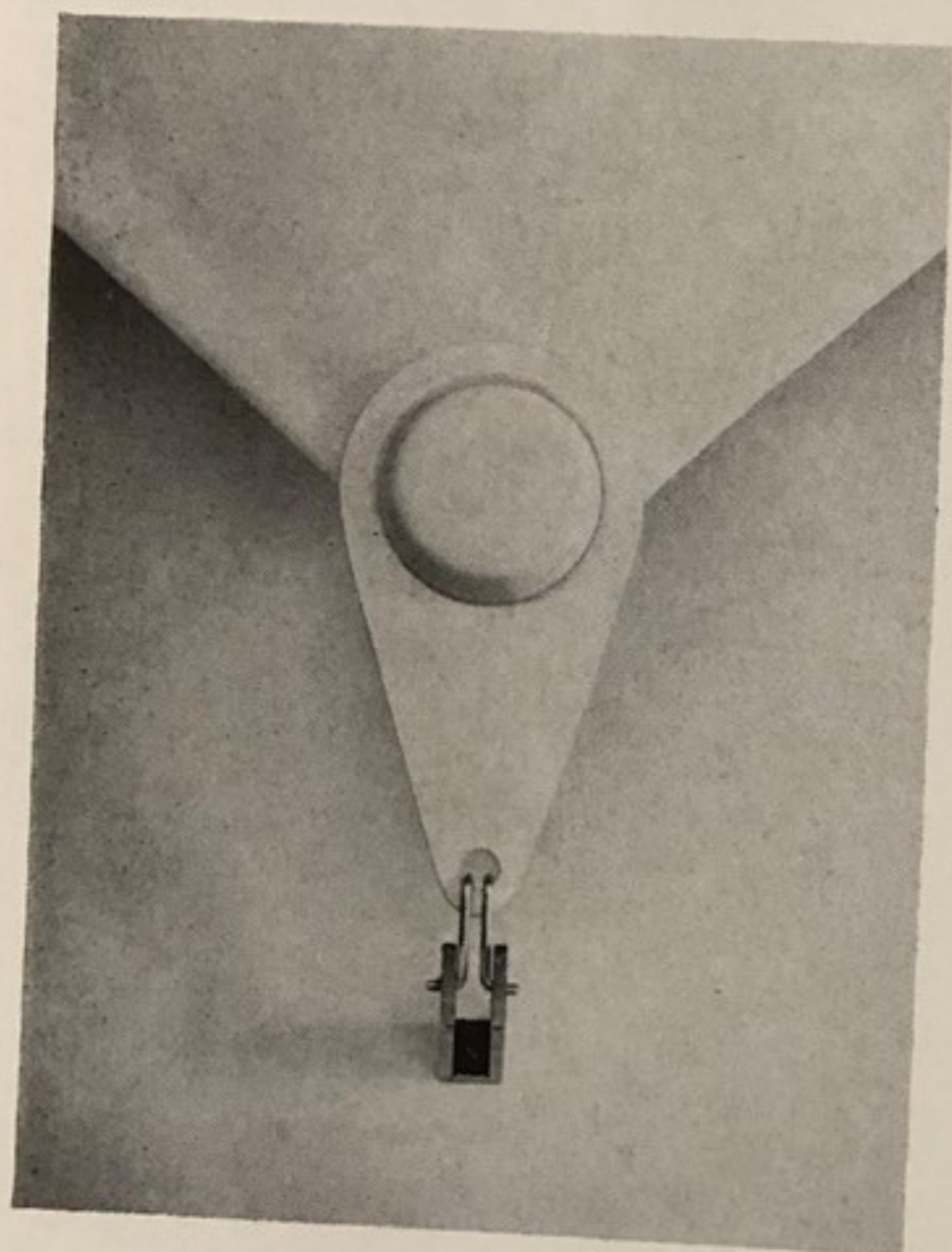
General Fireproofing "Universal" chair



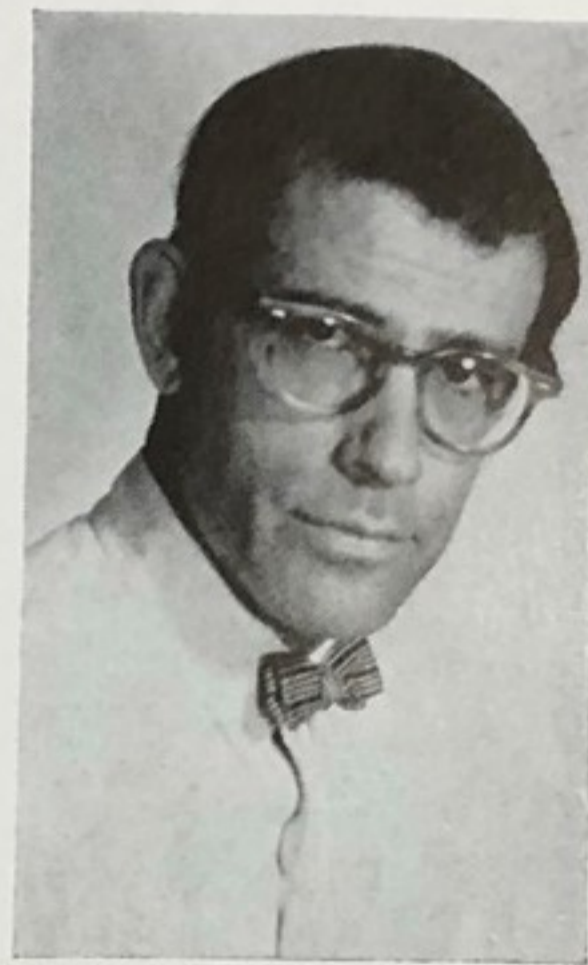
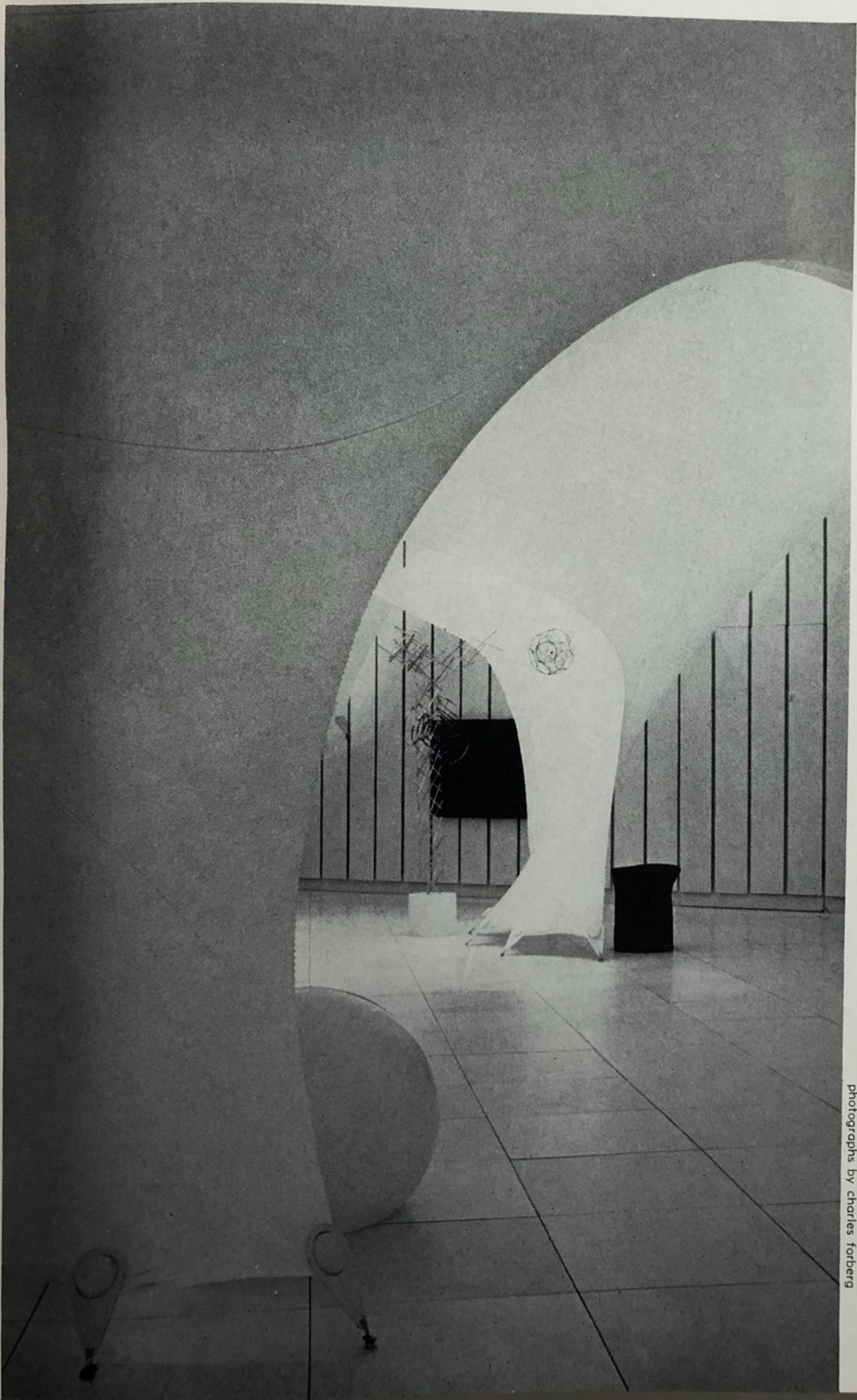
Sturgis "Flagman" road signal

THE UNITED STATES AT THE TRIENNALE

Architect Charles Forberg used a double-knit white nylon stretch fabric (donated by Stretch Fabric Inc.) as a ceiling, pulled it down and anchored it to the floor with plastic and metal components (illustrated) which he invented and had manufactured himself. In inverted parabolic dips and cutouts, Lenor Larsen placed the exhibits. White Adams vinyl (also donated) wrapped around vertical plywood boards were suspended to form a baffle through which air enters. Overlocked seams in the fabric make a ridge on the topside but only a shadow line underneath. Spaced at 30-inch intervals, they become part of



the design and emphasize the distortion of the fabric. The material provided a fantastic degree of freedom, to be raised, lowered, or cut into. But its curves, controlled by the limitations of the material's stretch, are always beautiful. The U. S. space is the only foreign exhibition in space, with only subtle modulation from opaque material to translucent canopy to reflective walls, dominant objects make an earthy statement of natural material. There is no fusion between shell and exhibits; the exhibits float in the space. To avoid a third element, the designers have kept fixturing minimal: a few drums and platforms.



Charles Forberg

Exhibition coordinator in Milan was Sergio Dello Strolago

PATRON-CONTRIBUTORS FOR THE TRIENNALE'S U. S. EXHIBITION: Block Foundation / Gardner Cowles Charitable Trust / General Fireproofing Company / Patrick Jackson / William Kelmsley / Jack Lenor Larsen, Inc. / Lightolier / Ben Mildwoff / Herman Miller, Inc. / Neiman-Marcus / William Pahlmann / Aileen Osborne Webb

photographs by Charles Forberg

