

Press release

01 January 1999

Modern Britain 1929-1939

The exhibition Modern Britain 1929-1939, which opens at the Design Museum on 20 January and runs until 6 June, has been designed by Sir Norman Foster with the graphic artist Per Arnoldi.

Modern Britain 1929-1939 provides a complete survey of the pre-War British Modern Movement which encompassed almost every field of creative endeavour, from architecture and painting to sculpture, illustration, furniture, textiles and product design. It charts the emergence of a pioneering generation of artists, architects and designers whose vision was to revolutionize the cultural life of the nation. It is certain to stimulate debate about their continuing influence, and the enduring relevance of the social concerns that inspired them.

Just as the current British creative revolution has generated renewed international attention, the 1930s in Britain was a time of extraordinary artistic invention and experimentation which propelled many of its practitioners onto the world stage. It also witnessed an increasing dialogue with the cultural movements of mainland Europe, many of whose leading lights were to arrive in Britain in the first half of the decade.

The influence of these migrants fueled the development of Modernism in Britain but it also offered a stark reminder of the disturbing social and political upheavals that came to overshadow the decade. Sir Norman's concept for the exhibition is based on a

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recognition that artistic endeavour is both rooted in, and influenced by, the society in which it is produced. The installation takes the idea of a 'timeline' through the decade - beginning with the financial upheaval of the Wall Street Crash in 1929, and concluding with the tumultuous declaration of War in 1939 - and weaves it physically in a sinuous, ribbon-like wall through the gallery.

This wall is designed to be 'read' at a larger scale than the individual objects - paintings, drawings, photographs and posters - that are integrated chronologically within it. The continuous text which runs along the centre of the wall records the key political and artistic events of the decade, juxtaposing artefacts with headline news and reminding the visitor that no work of art is created in isolation.

The exhibition offers the first integrated overview of the 1930s in Britain and aims to leave the visitor with a lasting impression of the simultaneous achievements and tragedies of this extraordinary decade.

Exhibition design: Foster + Partners

Graphic design: Per Arnoldi

Exhibition curators: James Peto and Donna Loveday

Curatorial consultants: Alan Powers and Judith Collins

Lighting design: Sutton Vane Associates

Sponsor: Bacon & Woodrow

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Exhibition Construction: Fox Displays Ltd

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