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New York World's Fair, 1939–1940

The 1939–1940 New York World's Fair was one of the largest world fairs of all time. Its cultural legacy has massively contributed in shaping the mass culture of post–World War II America and the world.

Opening a decade after the stock market crash of 1929 and the following economic depression, the New York fair was launched with the aim of uplifting the spirit of Americans while at the same time promoting a financial upturn by stimulating a culture of collective consumption through the display of new technologies and new consumer products.

Massive sponsorships came from the big corporations of the time (Eastman Kodak and AT&T, among others) and especially from the automobile industry, with General Motors and Ford in the front line. The emphasis on consumerism and on new technologies helped develop a new type of average American consumer.

The fair covered more than 1,216 acres in what once had been a wasteland in the Flushing Meadows area of Queens, also the location of the 1964–1965 New York World's Fair. Its main theme was "The World of Tomorrow," a utopian future of high-speed mobility, optimism, individual freedom, and mass consumption. Yet, by the time the fair reopened in 1940, World War II had already begun, and its second season was characterized by a much less optimistic climate.

The fair provided a prominent stage for experimentation in architecture, planning, and industrial design. If the celebration of the machine age was its underlying context, its main stylistic vocabulary

was that of modernism, coupled with futuristic and visionary architectures. Among the members of the Board of Design were modernist architects Alvar Aalto and Skidmore & Owings and designers Norman Bel Geddes, Raymond Loewy, Henry Dreyfuss, and Walter Dorwin Teague. Working closely with the fair's committee was also Robert Moses, New York City parks commissioner, who had for some time planned to transform the whole Flushing Meadows area into a park; he widened the freeways leading to the fairgrounds for the occasion.

International-style modernism was imposed over a classic layout made of panoramic axes and wide boulevards. The fair was articulated into seven geographical zones (communications and business systems, community interests, food, production and distribution, transportation, government, and amusements) revolving around a pivotal axis named Theme Center, designed by architects Wallace Harrison and Max Abramovitz. This was dominated by two monumental buildings: the Trylon and the Perisphere. The Perisphere housed a vast diorama designed by Henry Dreyfuss, called "Democracity," which visitors could enjoy from a moving elevated walkway.

However, the most popular pavilion was Futurama, sponsored by General Motors. The 36,000-square-foot exhibit designed by Norman Bel Geddes gave visitors an aerial ride through an immense diorama that envisioned the world 20 years into the future—1960. This model world was carefully designed with an incredible array of miniature towns, individually designed houses, 50,000 miniature moving vehicles, waterways, and a million miniature trees of diverse species. This landscape was dominated by a revolutionary superhighway that connected urban and rural areas, allowing individually owned vehicles to maneuver at 50 miles per hour. At the end of the ride, visitors reentered the present, reaching the General Motors' exhibit of cars for sale.

Futurama was attended by more than 26 million visitors in the two seasons of 1939 and 1940. An updated version of Futurama, portraying the future in 2024, returned to New York City on the occasion of the 1964–1965 New York World's Fair.

The utopian auto-based future envisioned in Futurama, together with the idea of the single-family home envisioned in "The Town of Tomorrow," left a long-lasting legacy on the American way of life and affected transportation politics in the years to come: Its promise of a society of automobile owners and publicly funded highway systems soon became a reality for most Americans. By promoting the idea of the automobile as a means of personal freedom, Futurama paved the way for the spread of suburban sprawl.

The futuristic utopias depicted at the 1939–1940 New York World's Fair massively influenced the collective imagination of the average American in the post-Depression era. The fair's cultural legacy lasted well into the late twentieth century, shaping a new consumerist middle class and setting the agenda for U.S. transportation policy in the postwar period.

Alessandro Busà

See also New York City, New York; Transportation; Urban Planning; Utopia

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Cultural and Social Aspects of the New York World's Fair, 1939

Pamphlet

By: National Advisory Committee on Women's Participation
Date: 1939
Source: National Advisory Committee on Women's Participation. *Cultural and Social Aspects of the New York World's Fair,* 1939, 8, 9, 13–18, 19–51. ■

Introduction

The first world's fair was the 1851 Crystal Palace Exhibition in London, England. The glass-and-iron structure housed exhibits from around the world, but, as might be expected, focused on the accomplishments of Great Britain and the British empire. Enormously popular, the London Exhibition set the tone for subsequent fairs in which a common theme was the celebration of technological achievement.

Two years later, New Yorkers opened their own Crystal Palace exhibition with a similar theme. Thereafter, a steady stream of "World's Fairs" and other significant exhibitions appeared every few years in Europe and the United States. In the United States, the most notable World's Fairs were the 1876 Centennial Exposition in Philadelphia, the 1893 Columbian Exposition in Chicago, and the St. Louis World's Fair in 1904.

The 1930s saw a resurgence of these great fairs in the United States with exhibitions in Chicago (1933–1934), San Diego (1935–1936), San Francisco (1939–1940), and New York (1939–1940).

The New York World's Fair was the largest and included several exhibits that were etched in the country's collective memory for several decades. Ostensibly a celebration of the 150th anniversary of George Washington's inauguration as president, held in New York in 1789, the fair's theme was embodied in its slogan: "Building the World of Tomorrow."

As expressed by the fair's Committee on Theme:

> The New York World's Fair is planned to be "everyman's fair"—to show the way toward the improvement of all the factors contributing to human welfare. We are convinced that the potential assets, material and spiritual, of our country are such that if rightly used they will make for a general public good such as has never been known. In order to make its contribution toward this process the Fair will show the most promising developments of production, service and social factors of the present day in relation to their bearing on the life of the great mass of the people. The plain American citizen will be able to see here what he could attain for his community and himself by intelligent coordinated effort and will be made to realize the interdependence of every contributing form of life and work.

The two great symbols of the fair were the Trylon (a 610-foot-high triangular obelisk) and the adjacent Perisphere (a dome with a diameter of 180 feet). The Perisphere housed the fair's signature exhibit: Democracity. Incorporating the current technology and theories of urban planning, Democracity was a core city surrounded by five satellite towns. It was a model of how the U.S. city of the future could look.

Many of the exhibits were corporate-sponsored. Two of the more prophetic were from General Motors (GM) and RCA. At the RCA exhibit, millions of people caught their first glimpse of the appliance that would dramatically alter American lifestyles in the 1950s and beyond: television.

Perhaps the most impressive exhibit was General Motors's Futurama. GM's vision of the future—America in 1960—was a nation of cars, suburbs, and highways. Futurama was a 36,000-square-foot scale model complete with futuristic homes, urban centers, landscape, and, most important, an advanced highway system on which cars traveled at speeds of one hundred miles per hour. Visitors viewed the exhibit from moving chairs that circled the impressive view of the future.

Significance

Impressive though the fair was, it never reached the attendance expectations of its president, New York adman Grover Whalen. The nearly 45 million visitors were insufficient to cover expenses, and when the fair closed its gates for the final time, in November 1940, it was millions of dollars in debt.

But by November 1940 the world was a very different place than it had been when the fair opened in April 1939. The world was at war. Poland had been occupied by Germany and the Soviet Union. France had fallen to the Germans. England, having already endured the German aerial bombardment for months, was battling the Nazis alone.

When the fair opened in the spring of 1940, the Czechoslovakian, Polish, and Russian pavilions were gone. Soon the French flag was flying at half-mast. The optimistic theme of 1939, "Building the World of Tomorrow," was replaced by a new 1940 theme: "For Peace and Freedom."

Although still at peace, Americans could not look to the future with confidence. Soon the brutal global war would, like the last one, destroy millions of lives and reshape the world. After peace finally did come, however, it was not long before many of the images of the 1939 World's Fair began to materialize.

Primary Source

Cultural and Social Aspects of the New York World's Fair [excerpt]

SYNOPSIS: The following are excerpts from *Cultural and Social Aspects of the New York World's Fair, 1939.* Included are descriptions of Democracity and Tomorrow Town, an exhibit that demonstrated new housing and urban planning ideas. Partially funded by the federal government, the fair reflected the government's increasing involvement in remedying the inadequate housing situation in the United States.

A Statement by President Roosevelt

"It is an inspiring thing for nations and communities to have high objectives, to unite their energies in self-appraisal, and boldly plan for the future.

"The World's Fair to be held in New York beginning in 1939 is a challenge to all Americans who believe in the destiny of this nation, and who welcome the knowledge that the exposition is to focus upon one central theme: Building the World of Tomorrow.

"At this great Fair all the world may review what the United States has achieved in the 150 years since George Washington was first inaugurated as President of the United States. Here millions of citizens may visualize the national life which is to come.

"That it will be a memorable and historic Fair, that it will profoundly influence our national life for many years to come, and that success may attend every phase of its activities—these are the hopes of the people of the United States. All power to your sponsors."

"The Fair—A Social Force"

Excerpts from Mr. Grover Whalen's Address at the Dedication of the Theme Center, August 16, 1937

"This day we have reserved as the dedication of dedications, for at the spot where we are gathered will rise the towering Trylon and the massive Perisphere which will dominate and give vivid significance to the entire exposition. Today, as we stand here on the brink of futurity, we hold tomorrow in our hands.

"It is fitting on this occasion to review the progress we have already achieved; for we have overcome many material obstacles, and we have already brought into being many superb material things. But no matter how successful these things are, or will be, they represent only the half of what we are determined to do. It is a monumental task to build the exposition we have planned; it is even more difficult to breathe into it a soul, to suffuse it with an idea, to provide it with social and philosophical significance. Ideas must ever shape, dominate, and give meaning to mere material things. The theme which permeates the New York World's Fair is noble and inspiring. This is the time, and this the place to restate our fundamental purpose, and to pledge the Fair anew to its consummation.

"The Fair will celebrate the 150th anniversary of the inauguration of Washington as the first President of the new American nation under the Federal constitution. This was a momentous event not only in the history of the United States, but in the history of Western civilization. Even now it is of the highest interest to America and to the world. May it remain so for the years to come! The founders of the Fair were early persuaded that this anniversary presented more than the opportunity to build a great exposition on a purely commemorative theme. To us, the future, pregnant with high destiny, seemed as meaningful as the past, with all its fateful achievements. Washington and his contemporaries, in their time, had, with courage and vision, plotted a course for the future; they builded better than the most optimistic had dared to hope.

"The contemporaries of George Washington were able to see life clearly and to see it whole because they lived the uncomplicated existence of a community that was primarily agricultural, but even this era saw the first beginnings of our modern scientific and industrial civilization. Science, in revolutionizing industry, has enriched and complicated every phase of living. Within the short space of several generations the world that men had known and



The Trylon and Perisphere, the symbols of the 1939 New York World's Fair. **AP/WIDE WORLD PHOTOS. REPRODUCED BY PERMISSION.**

understood for many hundreds of years rapidly disappeared. Never has civilization suffered such a profound change. The world was enlarged, enriched, and plunged into bewildering complications. We must, and we will, come to understand the world as one whole, integrated and complete—a single entity such as is depicted in our great Perisphere.

"So, in rendering homage to Washington and his illustrious colleagues, we determined to pattern our conduct upon their brave example. They solved the problems which threatened to destroy them. So we, in our time, resolved to gather together the genius and the imagination of the twentieth century to respond to those living questions which clamor for answers from living men and women.

"What is the deep significance of the dazzling scientific and material achievements of our age? What are the relationships of the various diverse elements of modern society? How can mankind work and live in peace and harmony? How can life be made more secure, more comfortable, more significant, for the average man and woman? This Fair, our Fair, your Fair, is determined to exert a social force and launch a needed message." . . .

We Approach a New Era

About 1850 the Queen of England, sensing that she had one small foot over the threshold of what has since become the Victorian era, set about planning the First International Exhibition, with her beloved consort, Prince Albert. It was to be a glorification of a new energy which was rapidly transforming civilization from an agricultural to an industrial basis. Everywhere people were excited by the change and opportunities, wrought by the harnessing of steam and the wonders of machinery. Human hands, which had toiled since the beginning at rough, hard tasks, seemed about to be released for pleasanter occupations. Steam trains, steam ships were taking some of the hazard and hardship out of transportation, and the shrinkage of distances had begun. It was a time of bright prospects, fine plans,

and great ambitions. The Victoria and Albert Museum in London still stands as a monument to the acumen of the British rulers and the tremendous success of the first organized effort to appraise man's progress and indicate his future.

Eighty-eight years after the first International Exhibition the New York World's Fair, with its audacious purpose, to take inventory of civilization's present resources and project a possible better World of Tomorrow, may well be the beginning of another new period. Airplanes and zeppelins now represent the steam trains and steam ships of Queen Victoria's youth. Skeptical we may be of rocket transportation for the future but not nearly so skeptical as people eighty-eight years ago were of horseless carriages and airplanes, if indeed they thought at all of such fantastic possibilities. So much scientific, industrial and intellectual progress has been made that we now speak with familiarity of the stratosphere, take pleasure trips in airplanes, regard automobiles as commonplaces, and have even begun to predict human behavior and hold off death. We have learned how to make cloth without cotton, wool or silk and how to grow food without soil. We take vapors apart and put them together again so that gas masks have become household equipment, like fire extinguishers, in some parts of the world. We can smash an atom, pick sound out of the air and send it on its way again, flash pictures around the world, keep the human heart alive and beating outside the human body and do a great many other astonishing things.

But the major portion of the world's population is still underfed, badly housed and ill clothed. Even in enlightened countries the preponderance of people are undernourished. Many millions of people in the United States of America . . . rich democracy which boasts a progressive viewpoint . . . live in communities blighted by poverty, crime and disease. And the nations of the world, instead of being brought to closer cooperation and increased happiness by the world-wide development of transportation, communication, production and distribution facilities, grow increasingly suspicious of their neighbors.

To the tremendous task of presenting a picture of more orderly, happier living, that can be brought out of progress so rapid it has frequently brought about maladjustment of individuals, communities and nations, the New York World's Fair 1939 is dedicated. While its primary object is to present to the world a vivid and integrated expression of the expanding American social scene, the cooperation and viewpoint of sixty-three foreign governments have been enlisted. Prominent men and women from the fields of science, art, philosophy, architecture and design decided the pattern of the Fair after a small group had procured the vast capital necessary to realization of the grandiose plan. They agreed that the theme of the Fair was to be:

> A happier way of American living through a recognition of the interdependence of man and the building of a better world of tomorrow with the tools of today.

To its anticipated sixty million visitors the Fair will say, here are the new materials, ideas and forces at work in the world. These are the tools with which the World of Tomorrow can be made, or can be wrecked. With these instruments we can achieve a happier, richer way of living.

There seems to be a misguided impression that the Fair has been using the word "theme" as a synonym for some kind of poetic theory. Actually, as soon as the sponsoring group had accepted the principle of the Fair's message a profoundly practical problem arose. How could the message best be given out? National fairs, and even international fairs, psychologists warned, are popularly regarded as amusement jags. The problem was the difficult one of presenting a social message to a vast and various assemblage of sightseers from all parts of the country whose primary desire would be release through amusement from the cares and responsibilities of routine living. How to impress fun-seeking millions with a social message they could never forget, that would influence them subconsciously to strive for a new concept of living? How to impress upon everyone the realization that the future of social, economic and political peace in the world depends upon recognition of the interdependence of individuals, groups, cities, states and nations? It was essential to show that the farmer needs the miner, the miner needs the educator, who, in turn, needs the man that makes his clothes in the factory. Each needs for his welfare the functional contribution of the other.

If people could be made to understand more fully the relation between the functions they themselves perform and the great world around them; if they could be made aware of causes of difficulties which they face in everyday living; if the complexities of modern living could be broken down and analyzed so dramatically that the least social minded citizen understood the reasons for his perplexities, much maladjustment between individual and modern con-

ditions, with resultant unhappiness, could be rectified. The Fair's planning group gave the problem months of consideration and research.

A spectacle was the obvious solution. But it must be a spectacle appealing to the mind rather than the emotions: drama so new and forceful that its social message would shine out as a climax overtopping everything else seen or heard at the Fair. The answer was the Theme Show which the Fair will present within the Perisphere. In the brief space of six minutes it portrays twenty-four hours in the life of Democracity, a city of the immediate future. The spectacle must necessarily be brief in order to get its message to the many millions of visitors anticipated at the Fair. By showing Democracity to 8,000 people an hour, for the period of the Fair, this can be accomplished.

The important task of designing a theatre for such a spectacle, and, at the same time providing a center of architectural interest at the Fair was entrusted to the architects who devised the Music Hall in Rockefeller Center: Wallace K. Harrison and J. Andre Fouilhoux. Their answer was the Trylon, the Perisphere and the Helicline. These are "made" words taken from Greek architectural and geometrical terms. The Trylon is a symbol of the Fair's lofty purpose, a triangular steeple of steel whose top is often lost in the clouds 700 feet above Flushing Meadow. Alongside it, seemingly floating on the spray of fountains at its base, the Perisphere symbolizes a complete plan; unity. The Helicline is the long spiral ramp which serves as exit from the Perisphere. These unescapable reminders of the Fair's social message dominate the 1200 acres occupied by the projected World of Tomorrow.

Democracity

To Henry Dreyfuss, famous industrial designer, was assigned the task of planning Democracity, a city of the immediate future, and making it so vivid to the millions who are to gaze upon it that each will feel it is a practical possibility and be stimulated to new interest in social and city planning. It was a job for a dreamer involving tremendous research, with great mechanical difficulties, and the creation of a new theatre technique. To begin with, no producer of a spectacle, however simple, has ever before been presented with an empty sphere and told that it was a theatre, and that within it was to be produced an unforgettable spectacle of a possible metropolis seen by thousands of spectators each hour like a mirage glimpsed in a flight through space.

Undaunted, Mr. Dreyfuss set to work with the architects and Robert D. Kohn, Chairman of the Committee on Theme. Difficulties were overcome one by one. The problems of entrance to and departure from the Theme Show within the Perisphere were solved by a double moving stairway giving access through the Trylon, and a long spiral exit ramp, called the Helicline. The Helicline is a descending curved platform from which a splendid view of the Fair's panorama provides a fitting climax to the spectacle of Democracity. Within the Perisphere two spectator platforms, one revolving clockwise and one counterclockwise, will carry audiences from Trylon entrance to Helicline exit. The six-minute interval within the Perisphere concentrates twenty-four hours in the life of Democracity and illustrates the interdependence of man.

To animate the world within the sphere, William Grant Still, Negro composer, has written a symphonic poem suggesting the city as a living thing, vibrant with the work and the lives of its inhabitants. Clouds float above the metropolis, and, as daylight fades and the city is illuminated, the stars appear, reproducing exactly the constellation of the heavens on the opening night of the Fair. This is the contribution to the Fair of Charles A. Federer, Jr. of the Hayden Planetarium.

Democracity is Mr. Dreyfuss' conception of how we should be living today. It is a city of light and air and green spaces. Stretching out in all directions are fine roads crossing broad green areas and connecting various industrial towns to the metropolitan center. Each industrial town is a complete unit of factory, homes and schools relying on the central city only for its general administration, its amusements and the things, commercial and cultural, that it cannot provide as a smaller community. The city has a vast transportation center where ocean liners, limited trains, airplanes and dirigibles report to a single terminal. In a vast basin nearby amphibians and speedboats find harborage.

From his safe vantage point on almost imperceptibly moving platforms that are seemingly suspended in space but are actually gliding smoothly on unseen struts projecting from the walls, the spectator can imagine himself dwelling in Democracity which seems to be above, below, and all about him.

The walls of the Perisphere form the largest screen on which technicians have ever attempted to project motion pictures. Ten different films will be projected simultaneously, with sound effect. At the climax of the drama columns of marching humanity

approach from a great distance singing the triumphant Marching Song of the Fair. These are workers of all kinds, representing the cooperation essential to the building of a World of Tomorrow and complete realization of the interdependence of man.

A radiance in the sky develops into a blazing curtain of polaroid light in which the vision dissolves as though fire poured over it slowly. The transported spectators emerge from the world of the sphere. The Helicline brings them gently back to earth and the Fair's broad bright reality. . . .

Tomorrow Town

Tomorrow Town, on the edge of the Community Interests zone, consists of fifteen demonstration homes ranging in price from low cost houses to houses costing around $20,000, and the Domestic Utilities Building, which contains a series of modern basements and utility rooms adaptable to these demonstration homes or to any type of new or modernized homes. These homes will exemplify the proper use of nationally available materials, equipment and methods for home building or home modernization.

The instruction given to the architects who designed these houses stated that they "should be consistent with the conditions of the Atlantic Coast States. This section as a whole should neither be traditional nor modernistic in design. It should be modern." The arrangement of the houses is not intended to represent a model neighborhood plan, as neither the circulation requirements nor the available ground area make it possible, but the houses will be representative of those that might be found in a satellite town, such as Democracity dramatizes in the Theme Show.

A special feature of each demonstration home will be that one room on the ground floor will be given over to a comprehensive exhibit of the "hidden" materials which have been used in that particular house. Here will be free-standing sections of walls, roofs, and floors showing their construction, including sheathing, insulation and special structural systems for walls, floors and roofs. There will also be models of framing systems, layouts of plumbing, wiring and other domestic utilities and special service systems.

Visitors to Tomorrow Town will receive a directory of the village, listing all exhibitors, their products and locations. In the demonstration homes booklets will be distributed giving complete plans for all the houses and listing participating manufacturers. This is in line with the Fair policy of stressing consumers' interests and assisting prospective home builders to obtain more value for their money.

Town Planning and Housing

The Committee on Theme, which was the original planning group for the Fair, visualized, as an integral part of the program, significant exhibits showing the economic factors involved in the improvement of living conditions of the American people and the fundamental aspects of the problem that will have to be considered in any cooperative effort by agencies, public or private, to bring about this social advance.

An important and original contribution in this field will be the first showing of a motion picture depicting the life and death of American cities. The film was prepared at the instigation of the Committee on Theme under the direction of Robert D. Kohn, through a grant from the Carnegie Foundation and will be shown in the auditorium of the Science, Education and Medicine and Public Health Building. It shows changes in housing conditions from the early years of the Republic to the present time and indicates further program for better town and city planning and housing methods. The American City Planning Institute appointed a special committee to cooperate with the producers of the motion picture, in the selection of material and preparation of the scenario on which it is based. The picture vividly contrasts the crime, poverty and disease of blighted and dying cities with the happier way of living in communities developed under large-scale planning.

The large part played by Government in the housing field is emphasized in a section devoted to Shelter in the Federal Building. The story of Government's aid in housing is told by the use of dynamic exhibits dramatized by a large sculptural work symbolizing federal housing aid. On each side of the sculptural mass are two large dioramas: one showing the Government's contribution toward the betterment of farm areas through farm rehabilitation, replanning and electrification. By means of colored transparencies, the work of Governmental financing agencies in relation to rural Housing is shown. On the right-hand side of the sculptural mass is another large diorama twenty feet long showing the Government's contribution in urban and suburban replanning. This diorama contrasts the bad conditions existing in some of our city's dwelling areas with the replanned, modernized sections reconditioned

through Government. Toward the suburban part of the diorama is shown a replanned town such as a "greenbelt" town with its planned streets, houses, underpasses, play areas and community centers. All this emphasizes what an important part the Government agencies play in the modernization and improvement of our city dwelling areas.

While "Tomorrow Town" is in no way intended to be an exhibit of low-costing housing, it makes its contribution to necessary information on that difficult problem through exhibits of new processes and the methods by which some well-known materials can be made more effective.

This exhibition includes only a section of a town and represents the adaptation to modern living conditions of dwellings for the American family of more than average income. It is meant to point the obsolescence of much small dwelling construction and show the home owner how to obtain more comfort, more value and more pleasure from his house, his garden and his community.

Further Resources

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NEW YORK WORLD'S FAIR (1939–1940)

The New York World's Fair of 1939 to 1940 in Flushing Meadow, Queens, celebrated a utopian vision of the "World of Tomorrow" that touted American machine-age industrial prowess. Organized by New York's business elite beginning in 1935, the fair was originally conceived as a celebration of the 150th anniversary of George Washington's inauguration in New York City. The organizers hoped that the fair would boost the local economy and alleviate Depression-era anxieties about the role of industry in American society. The emulation of an idealized past typical of other international expositions gave way, however, to an opti-

mistic vision of the future in which the availability of machine-made consumer goods created conditions for widespread prosperity and democracy. The only remnant of the original theme was a monumental statue of George Washington, depicted as if gazing into the future, that provided a link between 150 years of democratic traditions and modern American prosperity. Overall, the fair's modernist utopian vision predominated, symbolized by the Trylon and Perisphere that became the icons of the exposition.

Fair planners aimed to structure visitors' experience to reinforce the ideology of a machine-age consumer prosperity. Situated at the heart of a series of color-coded zones, the Perisphere housed the exposition's theme center. Here, visitors encountered the "Democracity," a vision of the planned communities of the future in which an efficient highway system linked a commercial urban core to suburbs designed for the modern living of the "average" American family. Industry pavilions underscored the significance of new technologies such as television and FM radio in creating consumer goods that would facilitate a distinctly American "way of life."

The World of Tomorrow was presented as a product of an industry-government coalition. One of the most popular exhibitions was the Futurama at the General Motors pavilion. Created by industrial designer Norman Bel Geddes, Futurama seated visitors in plush armchairs and conveyed them past a 36,000 square foot model of the American landscape as it would look in 1960. The efficient system of highways showed viewers the possibilities that could be realized by the automobile if government funding would create the infrastructure.

The fair touted federal and state accomplishments in its government zone amidst international exhibitions from more than sixty countries. Here, the backdrop of the war in Europe disrupted the fair's vision of a prosperous and peaceful future. Germany was notably absent from the lineup of European exhibitors, and the pavilions of Poland and Czechoslovakia remained open despite the Nazi takeover of those countries.

The streamlined modernism that characterized the fair's architecture and consumer goods was complemented by art of all styles throughout the fair grounds. Drawing on Works Progress Administration arts projects that stressed the integration of art and everyday life, fair planners made sculpture integral to the design of the fair; murals by Fernand Leger, Willem de Kooning, Stuart Davis, and others decorated the pavilions. With additional exhibitions of contemporary American and old master paintings, the fair became an art event that linked cultural achievement and American industrial innovation.

The amusement zone was a prime attraction and planners stretched unsuccessfully to connect its spectacles to the fair's utopian theme. Billy Rose's Aquacade, for example, was pure spectacle—an aquatic variety show with elaborate synchronized swimming held in a ten-thousand-seat amphitheater. Other displays attracted viewers with risqué offerings, such as Norman Bel Geddes's Crystal Lassies, a modern peep show enhanced by an elaborate system of mirrors, and Salvador Dali's Dream of Venus, a nonsensical surrealist "fun house" that featured semi-nude figures.

The World of Tomorrow was a financial disaster. Attendance fell short of expectations and organizers had lost millions of dollars by the time the fair closed on October 27, 1940. Many people, it seemed, found the admission price too high. Those who did come further disappointed organizers by seeking their own experience of the exposition rather than conforming to the planned vision. Nevertheless, the fair's legacy included new technologies and consumer goods that transformed daily life, and widespread acceptance of modernism in the areas of art, architecture and industrial design. The World of Tomorrow also popularized the idea of the "average" American, affecting corporate marketing strategies and Americans' own understanding of themselves.

See Also: SCIENCE AND TECHNOLOGY.

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