
EXHIBITIONS

If we write about exhibitions, it is to point out what in our opinion is wrong with them. In general exhibitions, competitions, and all other activities of this kind are most desirable, and it should be each craftsman's moral duty to take part in them, exactly as it is a duty of every citizen of a truly democratic country to vote. Exhibitions, when properly organised, not only encourage craftsmen, not only teach them, but also establish and clarify the line of development of each craft.

A good exhibition is not the one where I got the first prize. Far from it. I remember a national affair of this kind when out of 6 articles sent I have got 5 prizes, and still I consider it poorly organised. In another case out of 4 I have sent, 3 were rejected, but it was a good one, and the accepted entry eventually went to Brussel.

A poor exhibition is one where we know what to submit to get a prize, although we may not like what we send. A good one is when it keeps you guessing, so that finally we do our utmost on the principle that if this is not accepted, we are at least satisfied with our effort, and then have some right to blame the jury. The first kind makes us cynical, the second - creative.

What are then the prerequisites of a good exhibition?

1. Classification of entries. The greatest possible freedom should be left to the craftsman, so that any woven article could be entered (with limitation as to the size). The division of exhibits into classes is seldom justified. In practice it looks like this: No.342 - linen place-mats; No.343 - cotton place-mats etc. But if the weaver has mixed cotton and linen, even in a border, he is disqualified in advance. This is silly. Or he might have woven a head square, or a bridge table cover, but there is no such "class" and no way of showing it.

2. Prizes. Many exhibitions offer money, but very few think about printing really good looking diplomas, or certificates or what not. Most craftsmen enjoy more the recognition than the few dollars which are rather incidental and seldom cover the expenses.

3. Jury. In no case the jury may remain anonymous. Craftsmen should refuse to take part in exhibitions with "underground" judges.

It just may happen that the "jury" is always one, and always the same person.

The members of the jury should be always chosen among outstanding craftsmen and artists. Nobody else should be ever admitted. If the exhibition is of crafts in general, there should be at least one juror expert representing each craft. In judging each particular craft, the expert for this craft should have a right to veto any article which in his opinion is not technically sound. Thus we would eliminate all the burlap and cobwebs which seem to attract so much the non weavers in the juries.

If the exhibition is for weavers only, then the jury must have at least as many weavers as non weavers. Fashionable and glamorous designers should be avoided at all cost. They are too contemporary, their interest is often limited to the coming year, and they can not understand that handweaving reaches far both in the past and in the future. Too often also they unconsciously think in terms of "what sells best", instead of "what is best". By their very profession they are accustomed to cater to the lowest taste of the masses, whereas a real craftsman, and a real artist are leaders and teachers of the multitude.

4. Motivation. Each entry whether accepted or rejected should be sent back with a slip explaining the decision of the jury. To the best of our knowledge this is done as a matter of fact only in the Canadian National Exhibition. Please correct us.

5. Entries. They should be anonymous at least to the jury. This seems so obvious that it should be hardly worth mentioning. And yet how many exhibitions observe it? This requirement is important, not because jurors could be suspected of dishonesty, but because they are human beings, and can not fail to be impressed by a well known name. Also it protects the jury from any kind of suspicion which could be entertained by unsuccessful contestants.

6. Decisions. The verdict of the jury must be absolutely final. No presidents of Guilds, chairmen of committees, etc., should have any influence on the decision, before or after it is taken. Unfortunately this is not always the case.

So far we have been dealing with the organisers of exhibitions. But what about ourselves, the craftsmen, who after all have as much to do with success or failure of an exhibition, as the jury, and the

committee. What can we do? Plenty:

1. Never take part in any exhibition which is not run according to the rules outlined above.

2. Never think about winning when preparing your entries. Try to satisfy yourself, not the jury.

3. Do not send old pieces of weaving, even if they are our best. In many competitions it is specified that the articles submitted must be woven during the last year or so, but even if there is no such condition we should submit our recent efforts at a risk, rather than to live on a dividend. Supposing there is a weaver who some 20 years ago made a really good piece of damask, and keeps sending it ^{to} exhibitions even now, and gets prizes. If every weaver followed this immoral habit, there would be simply no place for newcomers.

4. For the same reason, if one is outstanding in one particular line of weaving to the point that he is absolutely sure of a prize, one should refrain from competing with others less fortunate. He can always try something new.

5. Finally, the weaving sent to an exhibition should be our own. Not just designed by us and executed or finished by somebody else. We know that infractions of this rule are extremely rare, but they happen. In a recent contest which could lead to an international exhibition there was such an entry. Fortunately it was not accepted.

This is about all.

It is our task to keep the field of exhibitions clean, and we can do it with a little effort.

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