



Studebaker Avanti Model, 1963. Collection Hagley Museum and Library.

Raymond Loewy: Designs for a Consumer Culture

National Heritage Museum, Lexington, Massachusetts
October 13, 2007–March 28, 2008

Paris-born American industrial designer

Raymond Loewy (1893–1986) put his hand to the (re-)design and (re-)“branding” of more consumer goods and products than most of us realize. This delightfully rich, compactly organized exhibition presents the breadth and depth of his influence, not only on the emerging field of industrial design, but also on the visual backdrop of 20th-century popular culture.

Exuberant childhood sketches of boats, trains, and automobiles presaged a multi-faceted career. Starting with the photograph of the young designer in his soapbox-derby racer, one can trace 40 years of auto styling and design that began in the '30s and included work for clients such as Hupp Motor Company, Chrysler, and Studebaker (including the Avanti). Several short videos show an ever-dapper Loewy “pitching” features of his Frigidaire kitchen appliances, presenting interiors of Air France’s Concorde, and hanging out with his gigantic Pennsylvania Railroad S-1 Locomotive at the 1939 New York World’s Fair. Here is the charismatic charmer who persuaded the s(n)ooty old

Pennsy to streamline an entire rolling stock inside and out.

He seems everywhere. No, he didn’t design the Coke bottle, but he did restyle the logo, supersize the plastic bottles, and design the now-ubiquitous aluminum can. The bright red streamlined Coca Cola fountain dispensers, as well as the now-collectable red Coke machines and ice chests, are all his. Surprises: he designed all three “themed” Savarin restaurants in Eero Saarinen’s TWA Terminal, including seating. Less well known: he designed the interiors and exterior graphics of Air Force One for JFK, the 1963 JFK Memorial Postage Stamp, the US Postal Service eagle logo, and the interiors for SkyLab. Most prolific work: corporate logos including Lucky Strike, International Harvester, Exxon, Shell, TWA, United, and Nabisco. He could be found in houses throughout the land, including packaging for Aunt Jemima’s Corn Muffin Mix and Jello. Toasters, radios, and plates, oh my! See for yourself. Be amazed.

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Third Ward, TX

Directed by Andrew Garrison, 2007
Produced by Nancy Bless, Andrew Garrison, and Noland Walker

(screenings and sales:
info@thirdwardtx.com)

It began as an art project. In 1993, artist Rick Lowe rallied residents of Houston’s Third Ward to create paintings on the boarded-up façades of dilapidated row houses. In this African-American enclave — long resigned to poverty and abandonment — participants used art to “turn nothing into something,” eventually transforming their neighborhood.

Third Ward, TX tells the story of Project Row Houses, Lowe’s campaign to buy and renovate these buildings. Art weaves through them all in different ways, including nationally recognized, semi-annual art installations. PRH has since expanded to become a community-building force — literally. PRH now has three major parts — exhibition, education, and transitional housing — with ambitions to also develop affordable housing. This fascinating film goes beyond the narrative to pose key questions about community, gentrification, and change.

We often hear about “civic engagement.” Here it is. Exactly the opposite of superstars who land and cast a vision, the success of Project Row Houses is all about listening.

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Bademli House. Architect: Hashim Sarkis. Image by Cynthia Gunadi and Cheyne Owen.

Hashim Sarkis Conversations on Architecture

The Boston Society of Architects
November 29, 2007

Hashim Sarkis, the Aga Khan Professor of Landscape Architecture and Urbanism in Muslim Societies at the Harvard Graduate School of Design, had a problem. “This house is troubling me,” he said to the gathering of friends and colleagues. “I think it is starting to fall apart.” There was silence around the table as two dozen pairs of eyes turned from the slide on the screen to meet the speaker’s warm but challenging gaze. He continued: “What do you suggest I do?”

In the first part of the evening, Sarkis had introduced us to the concepts that shape

his architecture. He set up dualities — geometry and graphics; geography and topography — and spoke of an architecture that draws meaning from its landscape without merging with it. Sarkis used several projects to demonstrate his points: an elementary school adjacent to an olive grove; housing for the families of fishermen displaced from the historic port of Tyre; a school in Tripoli for child-laborers and their mothers; a hot-air balloon landing site; a 400-meter-long “wall” building in Dubai; and a library whose wavy surface expresses both the library’s interior ramp and its sea/travel focus. Each one of these projects is a story of a social situation, characters, plot, and a landscape.

By the time Sarkis asked us what he should do with “this house” (shown above),

we had become to some extent literate in his language, and the conversation took off. His vision was of a summer house that follows a path down through an olive grove to the Aegean Sea — distributing as it goes a guest house, dining pavilion, living areas, bedrooms — all beneath the path, now a raised sea-viewing roof. The lure of merging with this seductive landscape was clear, and Sarkis worried that the house had conceded so much to its site that it might disintegrate. Suggestions poured forth; Sarkis listened, responding with interest and drawing the discussion to greater complexity — but clearly confident that the concept for this house was never really in danger.

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