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STRUCTURE, DICK VAN WOERKOM, JEAN GORIN, CHARLES
BIEDERMAN, JOOST BALJEU

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For the revival of constructivism and the presentation of universal laws in the line of De Stijl with the aim of achieving the complete renovation of our social environment, from the home to the city.

In 1962 the Sikkens Prize was awarded to three visual artists: Jean Gorin, Charles Biederman and Joost Baljeu; one architect: Dick van Woerkom; and one journal: Structure (1958-1964), founded by Baljeu. This English language internationally-oriented journal focuses on the synthesis between architecture and the visual arts. It opposes the “wave of unbridled chaos which overwhelmed post-war visual arts”, and a stand was taken against the “art for art’s sake” attitude which, according to the editors, characterized Tachism, Action Painting, Brutalism and Neo-Realism. Instead they adopted a positive point of view with the conviction that it was possible to rebuild the world and the aim was to achieve this by an increasingly far-reaching synthesis of the arts. The underlying aim was the integration of art and society in which abstract harmony was to be conceived as a metaphor for a just a happy modern society.

The 1962 winners of the Sikkens Prize all appear in the journal. They were linked by (neo)-constructivism which is an extension of De Stijl and Malevich. The four artists were also represented at the exhibition “Experiment in construction”, which took place a year earlier in the Stedelijk Museum in Amsterdam. Work by eight artists from different countries, who were all working in the neo-constructivist style, was exhibited at this exhibition. Their abstract – geometric paintings, sculptures and maquettes – closely resembled each other. Joost Baljeu was one of the organizers and published the text “The new visual expression” in the exhibition catalogue, revealing a changing view of reality: Nature as a visible reality was no longer the starting point for this new art, rather the expression of universal laws, immaterial principles of form which are the foundation of the cosmos. This new visual expression was not a reflection of this reality, but translated it: a process of intense internalization. It did not create forms, but plastic relationships. The new visual expression was positive. Instead of looking for the self, it presented the individual as part of society and every contribution to society as the highest aim. It is for this reason that the new visual expression was at the same time preparing for the

general renewal of our social environment: from the home to the city.

When the Sikkens Prize was awarded to Structure c.s., the commission's reasons were formulated as follows: we are happy with this revival of constructivism and are awarding this third Sikkens Prize along the lines of the two previous ones: Rietveld – spatial colorism – Structure.

At the beginning of this century there were great expectations with regard to the reforms of our society, according to a strict schedule and based on economic and social theories.

Expectations reflected in art, in cubism and abstraction, - Picasso, Malewitch, Mondriaan.

Order and construction became important elements in many fields.

Hitler and the nuclear era overwhelmed these expectations, hope and confidence disappeared.

Political groups switched from social aims to economic interests.

Art focused on individual feelings and tried to express personal vitality.

But here and there constructive tendencies revived.

Architecture and sculpture attempted to order three-dimensional space, this exhibition exhibits experiments in construction.

Willem Sandberg