

Modern Swedish Design: Three Founding Texts / Edited by Lucy Creagh, Helena Kaberg, and Barbara Miller Lane.—New York, NY: The Museum of Modern Art, dist. By D.A.P. (Distributed Art Publishing), August 2008.—320 p.: ill.—ISBN 978-0-870-70722-3: \$35.00 (pa.).



Modern Swedish Design: Three Founding Texts consists of newly translated essays by the pioneering Swedish design theorists Ellen Key (1849-1926) and Gregor Paulsson (1889-1977). These translations, laid out as near facsimiles with their original illustrations and fonts, provide insight as to why and how Swedish designers--and Scandinavians in general—exerted great influence over contemporaries in the U.S. and U.K. during the mid-twentieth century.

In the book's first essay, "Beauty in the Home" (1899), Key asserted the power of simplification and honesty in residential design, and the important role women played in shaping this formative domestic environment for children. Key, like her American contemporaries Gustav Stickley and Charles Keeler, critiqued the stale and meretricious mass-produced products of the Victorian age and the period's tendency to romanticize and revive historic styles. For her, simple models for design included folk art, natural objects, and select utilitarian items. Key was a

strong social democrat, who believed that design could help improve the economic and spiritual existence of all classes. To raise the profile of Swedish-made goods globally, she called for domestic manufacturers to form close alliances with artists and artisan groups.

In the second essay, "Better Things for Everyday Life" (1919), Paulsson—the head of the Svenska Slöjdföreningen (Swedish Arts and Crafts Society)--continued Key's main themes: shunning revivalism, encouraging simplicity and honesty in design, and stressing collaboration between factory owners and artists as a way of elevating Swedish products in the international marketplace. Paulsson strongly underscored Key's assertion that improved taste in Sweden would help to insure prosperity and satisfaction among all social classes.

Paulsson and six young modern architects collaborated on the final essay, "acceptera" (1931). "Acceptera" sought the abandonment of outmoded craft traditions and revivalism, and encouraged designers to embrace mechanization's liberating potential for mass-producing honestly contemporary, functional goods. Its authors produced a sweeping and nuanced analysis of current trends making this essay one of the key manifestos—written in any language—of the Modern Movement.

Editors Lucy Creagh, Helena Kåberg, and Barbara Miller Lane have contributed brief but informative essays that establish the context for each translated essay, as well as informative footnotes. A skimpy bibliography demonstrates how little Swedish modern design theory has been translated into English. *Modern Swedish Design: Three Founding Texts* is essential for academic libraries with programs in design and architectural history and very useful in museum contexts.

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