
G: Material zur elementaren Gestaltung (G: Journal for Elemental Form-Creation) was one of numerous ephemeral publications created by European artists in the early 20th century. What sets G apart from some of its predecessors is its interdisciplinary nature. Contributions were idiosyncratic. Anything of interest to lead contributors Hans Richter, Theo van Doesburg, El Lissitzky, Raoul Hausmann, Ludwig Mies van der Rohe, and Werner Graeff made it into the pages of G, such as men's fashion, automobiles, motorcycles, aerial photography, and machinery, alongside the more expected items on art, design, architecture and film. This smorgasbord of ideas, reproduced in English for the first time, is what makes the book such a valuable find for anyone studying the visual culture of this time period.

This book is structured into two parts: first, a series of essays which provide analysis on the major areas of visual culture explored in G and second, the translated-to-English facsimile of the journal itself. An overview which situates G and its major contributors in historical context begins the essay portion of the book. Other essays follow, one on each subject in the book's title, beginning with a brilliant essay by Maria Gough (Art History, Harvard University) which studies El Lissitzky's contributions to G's graphic design. This essay is a must-read for anyone interested in graphic design and/or typographic history. Subsequent essays by Edward Dimendberg (Film & Media Studies, University of California-Irvine) on film, and Detlef Mertins (Architecture, University of Pennsylvania School of Design) on architecture, are also well-researched and informative.

It is second part of the book, however, which is the real treasure. This book marks the first time G has been widely available to scholars on this side of the Atlantic, aside from a non-translated 1986 reprint by Der Kern. A team of designers carefully constructed a facsimile of G that is true to original documents held in the Museum of Modern Art, except the German text was translated into English. The typography, design and layout are preserved whenever possible; a detailed “Notes to the Reader” explains discrepancies and challenges of reproducing a publication that was created pre-computer age.

The only minor criticism with this volume is that the essay section could be better illustrated. The authors frequently refer to portions of the journal in their analysis; a more liberal sampling of images from G's original pages would augment the reader's understanding. When page illustrations are included, they are rather small, so it is difficult to discern the details so wonderfully described in the text. Limitations notwithstanding, this book is an essential purchase for any academic library supporting scholarship in visual culture, modern European art history, experimental film, architectural history, or design history.

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