

# Homemakers, Domestic Wares and the Cold War: Exhibitions of US Design & the Construction of the Domesticated Consumer Body

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## ABSTRACT

From 1951-1955 MoMA (NY) and the US government circulated major surveys of high quality American domestic design within Europe. This paper asserts that the exhibition organizers circulated these wares to present a tantalizing vision of American domestic and consumer life to strategically significant countries still impoverished following WWII.

The paper uses as a case study *American Design for Home and Decorative Use* prepared by MoMA's Edgar Kaufmann, Jr. and launched in Finland in 1953. Significantly, MoMA's exhibition was presented as a subsection of the *American Home 1953*, a Finnish exhibition featuring American domestic technology. Through an analysis of archival documentation relating to the *American Home 1953* the paper maps how the exhibition organizers deployed this exhibition as 'soft power': ostensibly sending it to Finland as a gesture of gratitude, while seeking to persuade Finnish families, and particularly women of the efficacy of American consumer goods and, in turn US values.

## INTRODUCTION

Harvard Professor Joseph S. Nye, Jr. coined the term 'soft power' to describe the ability to persuade others to adopt your goals using cultural rather than military and economic power ('hard power'). Nye argues that the adoption of a soft power approach will help the US maintain its position in world events (Nye, 2004). Governments in other locations have been quick to see the benefits of such an approach and are now choosing to use 'soft power' (i.e. cultural and exchange programs) to advance their interests abroad. For example, at the time of writing this paper the Australian government's Senate Standing Committee on Foreign Affairs, Defence and Trade is leading an *Inquiry into the Nature and Conduct of Australia's Public Diplomacy* and is seeking views on how Australia influences public opinion abroad using cultural means (<http://www.aph.gov.au/Senate/committee>).

It should be noted however, that while the term 'soft power' is relatively recent, Nye himself acknowledges that during the Cold War officials in Washington were already using 'soft power' approaches effectively to build support amongst other nations for the US against the Soviet Union. This paper centres on the period of the early 1950s when cultural programs played a role in advancing US strategic-economic agendas. More specifically it offers a timely case study of how and why the US government in conjunction with the Museum of Modern Art (NY) engaged in 'soft power' with Finland in the early 1950s, and why this Finnish-American cultural dialogue focused specifically on the domestic sphere. As such, the findings of this paper have major implications for informing current international government policy and practice.

While the US was indeed interested in fostering good relations with Finland in the context of the Cold War, *American Design for Home and Decorative Use* was not, as might be suspected, initiated by the US government. The American decision to send this exhibition to Helsinki emerged in response to the Finnish-American Society's (FAS) plans to stage a festival in 1953 to celebrate its 10<sup>th</sup> anniversary. Describing itself as 'a strictly non-political' entity, the FAS was established in Finland in 1943, during WWII, including amongst its membership leaders from different sectors of the community (<http://www.kolumbus.fi/sayl/web/eng.html>). The festival, with its tributes to American music, theatre, and design nicely reinforced the FAS's central mandate to promote friendly relations between the US and Finland. Of particular relevance to this paper's focus on the reception and consumption of US domestic design, was a special home economics display of American consumer durables chosen by the FAS. The FAS 'home economics' display, exhibited alongside *American Design for Home and Decorative Use* under the title of the *American Home 1953*, was promoted to Finnish viewers as representing some of the most sophisticated and aesthetically pleasing examples of American household technology currently available.

In the early 1950s such advanced American domestic appliances would have been out of the financial reach of most Finns. The decade following WWII was a period of economic hardship for much

of Europe and the 1950s a period of only gradual increases in consumption (Nolan, 2003). The same can be said for Finland, which after the war owed significant war reparations to the Soviet Union. As part of the armistice agreement of 1944, Finland was required to cede to the Soviet Union eastern Karelia, Petsamo and to lease to the Soviets the Porkkala area. Together these territories constituted significant regions of Finnish industry and in the instance of Karelia, of culture (Singleton, 1998). Finland also faced the task of resettling large numbers of people made homeless through the ceding of these territories to the Soviet Union (Singleton, 1998). By 1952 Finland had paid back its reparations, and moved to a peacetime economy, but remained in a relatively weakened state economically. Finland's survival during this period of reparations and into the postwar period is linked to its skill in moving to a relationship of friendly independence with the Soviet Union, while simultaneously rebuilding its ties with the West, in particular the US (Singleton, 1998). The FAS's cultivation of 'friendly relations' between the US and Finland should be understood as part of this larger endeavour.

Probably mindful of Finland's economic climate the FAS did not stage the home economics display to encourage Finland's importation of American consumer durables. Rather, the exhibition committee, dominated by leading figures from the Finnish home economics sector, indicated that it had devised the exhibition for educative purposes: to serve as a model to show how the domestic living standards of the Finnish population might be elevated, to improve the efficiency of the home, and, in turn, to lessen the burden of families within the domestic sphere. In this case, the audience for 'easing the burden' message was presumably Finnish women.

Interestingly, the FAS's plans to celebrate the benefits of American domestic technology coincided with contemporaneous moves by US officials to promote American consumer goods abroad (Castillo, 2005). The American Embassy in Helsinki was thus understandably eager to support the FAS's efforts to promote the US as a leader in domestic modernization, and persuaded the State Department to send a 'representative selection' of American domestic design to the Finnish festival. The exhibition was to be chosen by 'the world famous' MoMA, one of the nation's preeminent cultural institutions and sponsored by the newly formed United States Information Agency (USIA) (Our Exhibition, 1953).

The USIA had been established in 1953 by the Eisenhower Administration specifically to compete with the Soviet Union and other nations, who regularly used culture for propaganda purposes to advance their national interests abroad. Historian Richard Pells asserts that the USIA:

acted as a clearinghouse for culture as well as a ministry of information and propaganda. It was authorized both to tell the truth about the United States and to make foreigners more appreciative of America's domestic institutions and global ambitions (Pells, 1997).

Thus in deploying American culture to convince others of the efficacy and attractiveness of the American model, and to encourage international support for US 'global ambitions', the USIA had adopted what Nye refers to as a soft power approach. Given its *raison d'être* and the USIA's decision to sponsor *American Design for Home and Decorative Use* as one of its first projects indicates that Finland

was of strategic importance to the US. The background to this state of affairs is that in the lead up to and during the Cold War Finland, which shared its northern most border with the Soviet Union, had become a site of interest to both superpowers. Fearful of Soviet expansionism, the US in 1948 had launched the Marshall Plan, a massive relief effort to help rebuild economically dislocated countries to prevent them from succumbing to communism and to foster trade relations (Pells, 1997). To shore up support amongst this select group of European countries, the US had invited Finland, amongst others, to join preliminary talks the previous year. While in dire need of financial assistance for reconstruction, Finland declined Marshall Aid to avoid jeopardizing its relationship with the Soviet Union, which viewed the scheme as a US strategy to devise an anti-Soviet bloc (Singleton, 1998). Within this Cold War context, the FAS's decision to host a festival celebrating American culture provided a timely forum for the USIA to use a 'soft power' approach: that is to reinforce the activities of an organization sympathetic to the US, while using the exhibition to advance other US interests in the region.

The US government's decision to involve MoMA in the selection of *American Design for Home and Decorative Use* also offered certain advantages. Such an exhibition selected and presented under the auspices of this internationally respected museum could potentially attract the interest of local elites (cultural and otherwise) while simultaneously cultivating diplomatic and economic ties between the two countries. Since the 1930s MoMA had forged substantial cultural connections with some of Finland's foremost designers and architects when Scandinavia, including Finland, emerged on the international scene with what has been described as a humanist iteration of modernism (Woodham, 1997).

On a more practical level, MoMA possessed the skills and the infrastructure to accommodate such a request having sent abroad numerous exhibitions on behalf of the US government during World War II. MoMA was thus both well practiced in and supportive of the ways in which the US government used culture as 'soft power' to advance US foreign policy objectives abroad. From 1949 MoMA accelerated its efforts to foster international understanding through cultural exchange (Wheeler, 1952). Of interest here is that the USIA's request in 1953 for MoMA to mount *American Design for Home and Decorative Use* allowed MoMA to pursue a government-backed initiative it had launched in 1951 to promote abroad recent American domestic design (McDonald, 2004). This was a course of action that emerged out of the success of MoMA's *Good Design* exhibitions shown each year in Chicago and New York (1950-1955). Chosen by a team of experts drawn from the design industry and museum sector, and headed by Kaufmann who directed the *Good Design* program, MoMA's *Good Design* exhibitions promoted a distinctly modernist design aesthetic (stripped of historical ornamentation) and were marketed to US manufacturers, designers and consumers to promote the production and consumption of 'good' design in the US (Riley and Eigen, 1995). To capitalize on the newfound respect of Europeans who now identified Americans as 'designer

originators' and 'style leaders' MoMA launched this international design initiative in 1951 sending to Stuttgart, West Germany *Design for Use, USA*.

MoMA's decision to proceed with this international initiative in 1951 should also be linked to the US government's prevailing foreign policy agendas. At this time Marshall Aid was still being disseminated in Europe by the Economic Cooperation Administration, the agency set up to administer Marshall Plan funds and to share knowledge about the US and its 'key principles of economic efficiency, high wages, and unlimited productivity' (Hotz, 1951). It was the ECA that sponsored the selection and circulation in Europe of MoMA's *Design for Use, USA*. The exhibition which emphasized that US designers and manufacturers now worked together in the production of quality mass-produced domestic design wares, worked to reinforce the ECA's central message by seeking to reshape negative European perceptions about American mass culture and consumption (McDonald, forthcoming). This central narrative about the quality, innovation and superiority of postwar American mass-produced consumer wares would again be reinforced two years later via the USIA sponsored MoMA exhibition *American Design for Home and Decorative Use*.

The foregoing discussion highlights that there were a complex range of reasons for the US to send *American Design for Home and Decorative Use* to Finland in 1953. Each country brought its own agendas to the multi-layered 'dance' of international diplomacy. Key among these agendas was the US's desire in the midst of an escalating Cold War with the Soviet Union to strengthen ties with Finland, and to present the US as a powerful and worthy country with whom to ally. At the same time the *American Home 1953* became the site for the US to demonstrate American superiority within the area of domestic modernization as well as methods of mass production and consumption.

We should not underestimate the importance of the domestic sphere for the US and Europe in the post war years. According to Mary Nolan, while the US was once embarrassed by American consumerism, from the late '40s it began celebrating American consumer goods internationally 'as proof of America's cultural and political as well as economic superiority' (Nolan, 2003). And MoMA's involvement in this project as an agency capable of legitimating the high standard of American domestic design played a crucial role in this effort. The modernization of the home was not, however, a specifically postwar phenomenon, nor was it exclusively American. In the US and Europe in the interwar and postwar years saw the creation of 'modern individuals, with modern subjectivities and modern ways of living at home and outside' (Nolan 2003). Calling for less America-centric approaches to the study of the modernisation of domesticity in Europe, Nolan rightly notes that European efforts to transform domesticity, while perhaps responding to American models had indigenous roots and were harnessed to national projects of becoming modern' (Nolan 2003). This was certainly the case for Finland, as is evidenced by the FAS's decision to select for Finland an exhibition of recent American consumer durables (washing machines, dishwashers etc).

As noted earlier in the paper, the FAS's expert committee, drawn largely from the home economics sector, chose to organize this home economics display to help lift the living standards of the Finnish population and to redefine the role of women in the domestic sphere. The improvement of the domestic sphere had long interested those associated with Finnish home economics. Since its inception in the early 1920s home economics in Finland had attempted to professionalize domestic work: to raise its status to that of other skill-based professional work completed for wages outside the home (Saarikangas, 1993). This was a concern that the Finnish home economics movement shared with its American forebears who had pioneered home economics in the late 19<sup>th</sup> century (Rybcznski, 1986).

In addition, during the interwar years the kitchen and household had become increasingly rationalized as a site for 'active housekeeping and home economics' (Saarikangas, 1993). The management of the home was seen to play a vital and integral role in the national economy and was therefore to be organized along the lines of any business, to promote efficiency. Kirsi Saarikangas notes that in Finland:

there emerged a new concept of, and identity for, the housewife as well as a new social practice of home economics. The new 'scientifically' justified housing norms and requirements of hygiene applied to everyone, but most of all they touched a woman's life and made new demands on her. The pleasantness of the dwelling was tied to its neatness, cleanness, and health: the ideal was an ordered world where 'well-tended' was synonymous with beautiful (Saarikangas, 1993).

By the late 1940s, in the lead up to the FAS's home economics display the focus on the 'family' and 'domesticity' had reached an all-time high in Finland. This was a situation directly attributable to the state's alarm over declining birthrates and its implementation of a social policy designed to support large families and their position in society (Saarikangas, 1993). Thus it was within the context of the redefinition of the family/household that the FAS chose to host an exhibition of American consumer durables.

In keeping with the reform of the family and in turn the domestic sphere the FAS's 'expert committee' targeted its home economics display of American consumer durables at both industry and the general public. Following prevailing practices for the display of domestic design and industrial technology, the FAS presented these wares within a model home. In this instance it was a model *American* home complete with pantry, bedroom, bathroom, nursery and separate work/sewing area designed for the woman of the home. In each of these rooms the exhibition organizers featured what they touted as the most visually pleasing and technologically advanced American domestic appliances available on the American market.

While clearly impressed with recent innovations in American domestic technology, the FAS made patent its disinterest in the wholesale adoption of the American model by local industry. Rather, the exhibition organizers displayed these goods as new models only to encourage the *selective adaption* by local manufacturers and designers in the production of similarly innovative products (Our Exhibition).

The exhibition also aimed to educate the Finnish general public about the improvements to domestic life possible through recent advances in American domestic technology. Leaving nothing to chance, the FAS trained guides to instruct viewers of the exhibition on how to operate a selection of the displayed products (Report). In a real sense then the FAS's model American home functioned as a tangible context within which Finnish viewers could imagine 'using' the best and latest American consumer durables. Using photographs and textual sources published by the FAS in relation to its home economics display, the following section investigates the stories or narratives told by the FAS about the exhibition and how they assisted in professionalizing the domestic sphere and in re-imagining the roles undertaken by men and women in this setting.

A preliminary investigation of two FAS articles on the 1953 home economics display indicates that women are pictured in this modern domestic zone as the principal consumers and 'beneficiaries' of the modern American domestic technology. An interesting subtext of these texts and images is the construction of a supporting domestic role for male spouses. In one article, for example, of the four images featured, three picture American women in action within domestic interiors, two in kitchens, a third in a utility room, and all demonstrating how to use new American products. One image features a Westinghouse kitchen. The image, probably supplied by the Westinghouse Electric Company to promote its products, includes a young well-groomed woman opening the door of her Westinghouse refrigerator set within a spacious, light-filled kitchen, with generous expanses of empty workbench space and a picture window leading beyond the kitchen. The caption tells the reader why this is the 'dream kitchen' of Westinghouse's design department: because it contains an electric dishwasher, auto waste disposal unit, bench for food preparation, pull-out wood cutting board, and an electric oven, and all installed with considerable attention given to their 'practical placement' (Our Exhibition). At once a strategy by Westinghouse to promote sales, the information conveyed in this caption about how housewives worked within and organized their homes greatly interested home economics groups eager to transform from housewifery into an efficient and professional enterprise.

In another scene a young American mother and presumably her daughter dressed in aprons, are captured washing and drying the dishes at a kitchen sink. The angle of the photo prohibits a broad sweep of the interior space. Nevertheless, the section of the kitchen visible looks modern, spacious, light, clean and again efficiently organized as in the image discussed above. The picturing of the mother and daughter working together in the kitchen reinforces once again that it is a zone managed and operated by females. Men, absent from these images, are constructed a role in support of women as is suggested by the caption accompanying this image:

The awareness that every family member must help mother and ease her burden, has been spreading...in America the father often participates in duties which were previously considered to be 'just for women' such as washing the dishes or cleaning (Our Exhibition).

What can be drawn from the analysis thus far is that these images and captions, with their emphasis on cleanliness, order and efficiency convey a sense of the home as a modern and attractive environment, with well-groomed women as modern housewives capable of operating equally attractive modern domestic equipment. As such they conform to the countless numbers of images of household technology that the US dispersed throughout Europe from the early 1950s via the print media and exhibitions. Mary Nolan rightly argues that representations of this kind offered European women 'the ambiguously emancipatory promises of both Americanized mass culture and Americanized forms of domesticity, marriage and motherhood' (Nolan, 2003).

The methods of display used in the Taidehalli's presentation of the *American Home 1953* also played an important role in shaping how Finnish viewers perceived American domestic life. The joint display occupied the entire floor space of Helsinki's Taidehalli (Art Hall). One wing of the venue contained the model American home containing the Finnish selection of American consumer durables and the other MoMA's *American Design for Home and Decorative Use*. It seems reasonable to conclude that the model American home functioned as a helpful framing device for viewers to imagine using not only the washing machines, dryers and ovens but also the many modern domestic design wares (saucepans, glassware etc.) presented within MoMA's *American Design for Home and Decorative Use*.

Of course such a joint showing made sense on one level, given the shared domestic orientation of each exhibition. In *American Design for Home and Decorative Use* Kaufmann selected wares for decorating all rooms of the home by well-regarded American designers and manufacturers, including George Nelson, Charles Eames, Don Wallance, Russel Wright and Eva Zeisel. *American Design for Home and Decorative Use* included sections devoted to 'Tablewares' (i.e. dinnerware, flatware); 'Utilities' (i.e. ashtrays, clocks, radios); 'Textiles'; 'Furniture' and 'Household Objects' (i.e. saucepans, toasters). Kaufmann also presented a modest selection of 'Light Fittings', 'Rugs, and 'Jewellery'. Collectively, these individual sections provided Finnish viewers with one (albeit a selective) impression of what American consumers, and in particular women chose to consume and use in their homes. (For by emphasising a distinctly modern or 'high' design aesthetic, the exhibition provided a narrow conception of the actual state of contemporary American domestic design). An examination of the exhibition checklist also indicates that Kaufmann wanted to emphasize the range of production methods currently used by American designers: hand-crafted designs, mass production techniques and a combination of these methods.

Significantly, it was methods of production that Kaufmann chose to focus on in his catalogue essay. Perhaps aware of negative European perceptions of American methods of mass production, Kaufmann tried to allay the concerns of viewers abroad about the standardization of American design:



What is the position of the creative artist [in the US]? Will the individual drown in the mass? Will the quality of a product suffer when only novelty and popularity are pursued? Have machines and marketing methods acquired a central role? (Kaufmann, 1953).

Kaufmann confidently replied that American creative artists, far from being constrained, had actually benefited from such 'inspiring' conditions. In the remainder of his essay Kaufmann outlined the three prevailing modes of production used by American designers.

In the first group Kaufmann placed those 'artists' dedicated to the mass production of domestic design items and used as one example of this mode the plastic tableware of well-known designers George Nelson and Russell Wright. While praising this group for their efforts in resolving the teething problems associated with this mode of production, Kaufmann suggested that there was more to be done in addressing the toughest problem: how to harness such technical achievements of mass production for the benefit of American consumers. In the second group Kaufmann put those artists who believed that the contemporary world desired individual expression and warmth of touch not possible to achieve via techniques of mass production. For Kaufmann this trend was best exemplified by hand-made clay wares, textiles and jewellery. Curiously within this same group Kaufmann devoted roughly half of the jewellery section to works by Native American artists, among them Ambrose Roanhorse, Dooley Shorty and Chester Shorthair. Representations by Native American artists and tribes were also included elsewhere in the exhibition, but in numbers so small one can only wonder why they were included. Perhaps MoMA thought it important to profile hand-produced design wares, particularly by indigenous peoples to signal to Scandinavians renowned for their craft traditions, the US's comparable commitment to and respect for such cultural practices.

However, it was in the third and final group of artists that Kaufmann held greatest store. This select group of furniture designers combined techniques of mass production with hand-crafting, and were part of what Kaufmann described as a 'growing humanism' who would 'bring forth in the future healthy developments' (Kaufmann, 1953). Among them were Harry Bertoia and Eero Saarinen for Knoll Associates, Katavolos, Littell and Kelley for Laverne Originals and Charles Eames and George Nelson for The Herman Miller Furniture Company.

The eclectic mix of design items within *American Design for Home and Decorative Use* presented Finnish audiences with a complex message about American design, about its long history (begun with the cultural productions of Native Americans who were apparently still active producers), about what it shared in common with Europe via its respect for hand-crafted design. As importantly, the exhibition also signalled how the US differed from (European) 'tradition' via the progress that had been made over time by technological developments (hand-made to machine-made and combinations thereof) and about the sheer diversity and quality of design forms available in the US at mid-century. While respectful of tradition, using it as a benchmark for their own work, American 'artists' did not 'worship it blindly' (as we might infer that European designers still did). Rather, according to Kaufmann, American designers worked to resolve today's problems using current

methods and to find new ways of expressing the American way of life that he hoped would provide 'new inspiration' to foreign viewers (Kaufmann, 1953).

Based on research completed thus far, it can be said that at least one powerful figure from the Finnish design sphere was 'inspired' by the exhibition. In an editorial written for the Finnish home journal *Kaunis Koti* (Beautiful Home) Eila Jokela, editor-in-chief praised MoMA for the exhibition and proclaimed that 'especially the kitchen, with the latest fashion washing machines, fridges, ovens, kitchenware, showed to housewives, what the famous American art of living signifies: an appropriate and high standard of living' (Jokela, 1953). Jokela astutely noted that with a buoyant economy based on abundant natural resources and mass production the US was well-placed to realize such a high standard of living, affordable to most working Americans. By contrast to Kaufmann, Jokela was unequivocal in his praise of the use by American designers of what he termed 'the innovative ambiance of mass production'. But, like Kaufmann, he praised the American designer's interest in addressing 'the needs of today' instead of remaining bound to tradition as in the old countries, like Finland, declaring that 'the US has, despite its young age and young culture, contributed to humankind the *art of living*.' Jokela concluded his article by berating Finnish designers and manufacturers who while having gained the respect of the international design community for artful and expensive design wares, had available few mass-produced utility wares for everyday use (Jokela, 1953).

## CONCLUSION

What this paper has shown is that the *American Home 1953* provided a viable and legitimate means by which the US and Finland could reconnect, to develop existing relationships in the changed climate of the Cold War era. As the foregoing discussion suggests the strengthening of ties was desired by both countries. At the same time the foregoing critical analysis reveals that the *American Home 1953* became the site for the FAS and the USIA/MoMA to advance dialogues of a different kind, centred on the discourse of domestic modernization. For its part the America-friendly FAS looked to the American model of domestic technology to assist in lifting the living standards and lightening the load of the Finnish population after years of hardship suffered during and after the war. As the foregoing discussion also indicates, the FAS exhibition worked to encourage manufacturers and designers to *selectively adapt* (not adopt) the American model in the production of similarly innovative domestic appliances. Additionally, the home economics display can be read as an effort to inculcate a desire for such domestic products in Finland at a time when the domestic sphere and housewifery were undergoing major reform and professionalization by different groups, including the Finnish home economics movement.

With contemporaneous efforts underway by the US to promote American political, cultural and economic leadership via its international promotion of American consumer goods, the US

government eagerly supported the FAS initiative, by sponsoring MoMA's *American Design for Home and Decorative Use*. A critical analysis of the exhibition reveals that *American Design for Home and Decorative Use* functioned as both a gesture of gratitude to the FAS for hosting the *American Home 1953* and more broadly as a means by which to convince the Finns of the attractiveness of the American model and US leadership in the area of domestic modernization. This effort to persuade others of the attractiveness and strength of the US was of course never addressed directly. For, to do so would undercut the effectiveness of such a 'soft power' approach. For example, in his essay Kaufmann directly acknowledged the influence of (European) tradition as a benchmark for recent US design production. But within this same text he only indirectly addressed the superiority of recent American domestic design, which we might infer was now a harmonious alliance between the best creative 'artists' and the innovative use of the latest production methods (mass production and hand crafting). As such Kaufmann's text worked to gently persuade Finland of the distinctiveness of American domestic design, now of sufficient quality and difference to act as a model to inspire comparable Finnish developments in design practice.

In 'Selling Nations' Brian Wallis persuasively argues that the practice of using international exhibitions as a form of cultural diplomacy is a widespread phenomenon. To support his argument Wallis profiles a range of late 20<sup>th</sup> century exhibitions in which different nations have presented a certain construction of 'national culture' to one significant foreign audience, typically the US. 'Their unabashed purpose' he rightly claims, 'is to transform negative stereotypes into positive ones and, in the process, to improve the political and economic standing of their country' (Wallis, 1994). As the foregoing discussion makes clear *American Design for Home and Decorative Use* has much in common with its late 20<sup>th</sup> century counterparts. But unlike the examples discussed by Wallis, in this instance, it was the US (USIA/MoMA) that deployed *American Design for Home and Decorative Use* as 'soft power' within a foreign setting, engaging in a complex repertoire of purposely ambiguous 'dance manoeuvres' to progress strategic agendas within the region. As with the 'ambiguously emancipatory promise' of a glamorous professional life offered within images of women engaged in the domestic sphere so too was a kind of double-coding at play in the staging of *American Design for Home and Decorative Use*.

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