

ORIGINS OF MASS CUSTOMISATION IN EUROPE

DESIGN BY CHOICE

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As a presentation and network organization, Bureau Europa/platform for architecture, design and fashion presents exhibitions and other activities on the culture of the designed environment. Bureau Europa's focus is mainly on Europe and the Euregion from a social perspective and contemporary topics relevant to society at large.

Design by Choice

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10 October 2015 – 17 January 2016

Opening: Saturday 10 October, 17.00 - 19.00

In recent decades, tailor-made solutions, customised items, rapid prototyping, and new communication tools and distribution systems have drastically altered the bonds between production and consumption. Building on Reyner Banham's seminal publication "Design by Choice", dedicated to modern cultures of consumption, the exhibition revisits industrial production and consumption prior to the advent of standardised mass fabrication.

At the centre of the exhibition is a representative sample of Western European cast iron trade catalogues. By the mid-nineteenth century, when furnace technology was improved, foundries in Scotland, France, and Prussia set the pace for product innovation. Jewellery, candlesticks, chairs, canons, fountains, and columns were serially produced. Together with their products, foundries also invented a new commercial means: the trade catalogue. Published all over Europe, the catalogues served as efficient communication tools between producers and their steadily growing clientele.

'Design by Choice' invites visitors to discover these former objects of desire as depicted in nineteenth-century trade literature. Focussing on the European dimension of the Industrial Revolution, international exchanges and commonalities are addressed. Specific designs are traced back to their common sources such as archaeological objects or architectural sourcebooks.

In-depth studies of the German Sayner Hütte and Scottish Saracen Foundry provide insights into the production technology and distribution networks. Based on the designs for the Parisian Saint-Geneviève Library by Henri Labrousse and London's Paddington Station by Isambard Kingdom Brunel, the different attitudes that architects and engineers assumed towards cast iron are expounded upon.

Curators: Axel Sowa (RWTH Aachen University) and Jules Schoonman
Graphic design: Adriaan Mellegers
Research and design assistants: Ayça Sancar and Juliane Seehawer