Torbjörn Lenskog’s Industrial Design Collection to the Nationalmuseum

Maria Perers, Curator, Applied Art and Design
The shelves in Torbjörn Lenskog’s home are crammed with 20th-century design classics from 1915 to 1975. Rows of streamlined irons that conveyed efficiency to rational housewives of the time. Electrolux’s revolutionary vacuum cleaner on runners that made cleaning easier. The history of the electric shaver is told by original packaging, from aerodynamic maroon to elegant black from Braun. As industrial design became the new profession of the era, masses of new products were launched to make life easier at home and in the office. Lenskog has collected thousands of objects that reflect this change. Now, the Friends of the Nationalmuseum’s newly-started Design Fund has enabled the Museum to acquire several key design objects that tell us how life became modern in the 1900s. The purchase of 23 items from Torbjörn Lenskog’s collection will enhance the Museum’s collection of Swedish industrial design inspired by American and German products, and key works from design history. (See pp. 195, NMK 332–354/2016)

Appliances that had previously been heavy and bulky became smaller and more convenient. Like when Raymond Loewy created the practical camera Purma Special in 1937, that you could easily carry in your pocket, as a symbol of how photography had become an inexpensive hobby. Only a decade earlier, the first mass-produced 35 mm cameras had made it possible for more people to take their...
own pictures. In the 1950s, Marcello Nizzoli designed modern calculators and typewriters with functional contours and distinctly designed graphics for numerals and letters. And a couple of decades later, the calculator had become so small that it was portable. These are examples of items that are now in the Nationalmuseum collection.

This is not the first time Torbjörn Lenskog has contributed to the Nationalmuseum’s activities. The exhibition Reternity in 1996–1997 featured a couple of hundred works from his collection, but his focus has not always been on design. It all began when his wife Ulla gave him a Linnaeus medallion, and he wondered how many pictures there could be of the famous 18th-century botanist. He went on to collect all the books he could find. When the collection was complete, he sold it and switched to chemistry. In collecting, Lenskog found a sense of peace in his hectic life as a successful advertising professional. He was able to enjoy the little things instead of producing. Eventually, his interest transferred to design instead of books. One day in a curiosity shop, Lenskog suddenly recognised a smell from the past. He was holding a little box that reminded him of the smell when his father shaved with his Bakelite shaver. There had been a box like this one in the medicine cabinet when Lenskog was a child.

Recently, he felt ready to part with some of his design collection, so that everyone can enjoy it at the Nationalmuseum. The focus of his collecting now is French powder compacts from the early 20th century. The graphic design of these artefacts appeals to Lenskog, and there might be a book one day when his collection is complete.

Notes: