The Afterlife of Danish Modern: Design Exhibition in Moscow, 1969–70

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The Afterlife of Danish Modern: 
Design Exhibition in Moscow, 1969–70

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Abstract

The exhibition Contemporary Danish Design arrived in Moscow in December 1969, when Danish design was undergoing a crisis. The popularity of “Danish Modern,” the notion centered on excellent artisanship, natural materials, and a balance between tradition and modernity, was diminishing due to shifting tastes in home furnishing and consumer society critiques. This article considers the Moscow exhibition as a twin effort to include design in Danish-Soviet cultural diplomacy and to revive the cultural importance of Danish Modern in the era of waning techno-optimism and student protests.

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The late 1960s was a critical time for Danish design. In the preceding decade, Danish designers, critics, curators, manufacturers, and sales managers had successfully promoted Danish design abroad, especially in North America and in the United Kingdom. Their visions, exhibition techniques, and market pitches eventually solidified the notion of “Danish Modern” centered upon excellent artisanship, natural materials, and a balance between modernist faith in progress and respect for the handicraft tradition.1 The exhibition Design in Scandinavia that toured the United States and Canada in 1954–55 gave Denmark the reputation of a leader in design among the Nordic countries.2 By the early 1960s, however, tensions started rising between the key organizations that had succeeded in making Danish design world-famous. The most renowned segment of Danish design, namely furniture, underwent an especially challenging crisis: the tight cooperation between cabinetmakers and architects, the signature feature of mid-century Danish design, gave way to conflicts. The Cabinetmakers’ Guild criticized the Landsforeningen Dansk Kunsthåndværk [Danish National Society of Arts and Crafts, or LDK], for being too focused on commercial success and negligent of handicraft tradition. The latter also experienced internal criticism and kept losing members throughout the 1960s. The popularity of Danish Modern diminished in the face of shifting consumer tastes in Denmark and abroad, the popularization of new materials and pop-culture-inspired shapes, and rising critiques of consumer society.3 The protest against the XIV Design Triennale in Milano in 1968 with slogans attacking bourgeois consumption, such as “Make Love – Not Design,” epitomized the crisis of the modern design movement, of which Danish Modern was a part.4 However, LDK survived with governmental support and carried on its exhibition activities, albeit with less international acclaim.5 This activity was directed not primarily towards North America and the UK, as in the previous decade, but elsewhere: from other Scandinavian countries to continental Europe, on both sides of the Iron Curtain, to Australia, Japan, North Africa, and South America.6 This paper argues that the afterlife of Danish Modern is worth considering because it exemplifies strategies for managing crises in national design. Crisis management is no less important than success and glory in design history. Additionally, the post-golden-age period of Danish design is remarkable for its opening up to the Eastern bloc countries. In April 1965, LDK staged its first exhibition behind the “Iron Curtain,” in Warsaw.7 Four and a half years later, Danish Modern, no longer popular in the West, arrived in Moscow. This article focuses on the twin aim of LDK: to include design, as a national asset, in Danish-Soviet cultural diplomacy and to revive the cultural importance of Danish Modern. While not a Cold War superpower, Denmark, I argue, strived to remain a superpower in the sphere of design. To evaluate the success of this effort, I will consider different stages of the exhibition that involved various institutions and individuals: from ministers to cleaners. Could Denmark repeat its mid-century triumph in the U. S. with its Cold War rival, in the era of waning techno-optimism and student protests?

**Design as a Tool of Diplomacy**

The role of design shows in the ‘Cold war on the Hot Front’ (to use the expression of Greg Castillo)8

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4 Guldberg, “Scandinavian Design as Discourse.”

5 Hansen, Danish Modern Furniture, 1930-2016, 315-86.


7 Greg Castillo, Cold War on the Home Front: The Soft Power of Midcentury Design (U of Minnesota Press, 2010).
has been explored by many studies that focus not only on international expos but also on exhibition exchanges between countries. Design historians have shown how both governmental and non-governmental institutions used different strategies to communicate a nation’s positive images to foreign audiences through design. The exhibition *Contemporary Danish Design*, held in Moscow in the winter of 1969–70, exemplifies the involvement of different actors in displaying the national brand and setting professional connections.

The exhibition was a follow-up to the 1962 Cultural Agreement between Denmark and the USSR and to the 1969 Danish-Soviet Trade agreement. LDK, an organization that emerged in 1927 and was a champion of promoting Danish design abroad in the 1950s, took responsibility for preparing the exhibition with the support of the Danish and Soviet Ministries of Culture. Against my expectation, I have not found any evidence of the involvement of the *Landsforeningen til samvirke mellem Danmark og Sovjetunionen* (National Association for Cooperation between Denmark and the Soviet Union) that had regularly hosted different Soviet exhibitions since its foundation in 1924. In 1959, the *Samvirke* co-organized two Soviet exhibitions in Denmark: the display of Soviet graphics in Den Frie exhibition hall in Copenhagen and the technical exhibition dedicated to *The Peaceful Atom* in the Copenhagen City Hall. The archival records of *Samvirke’s* Soviet counterpart, the society *SSSR-Danii*, likewise do not mention the 1969 design exhibition at all. Supposedly, the Friendship Societies, with their emphasis on socialist ideology and culture, were neither interested nor competent in promoting Danish design.

This was not the first exhibition of Western design in the USSR. In 1959, the U.S. National Exhibition in the Sokolniki Park in Moscow famously familiarized the Soviet citizens with the “American Way of Life” and its material manifestation—a size-life model of a modern home with a General Electric kitchen. Less known are design exhibitions targeted at professionals and organized by the All-Union Research Institute of Technical Aesthetics (VNIITE), the main Soviet design institution established in 1962. The director of VNIITE, Iurii Soloviev, was on good terms with the governmental officials and, thanks to his access to foreign travel, familiar with the latest national and international trends in design. Soloviev actively used his diplomatic skills and personal connections to attract foreign design exhibitions to the Soviet Union. This “design propaganda” aimed at giving Soviet designers first-hand experience with the icons of contemporary design and at educating the public about modern consumer culture in accordance with the governments’ encouragement of rational consumption. In 1964, Moscow hosted an exhibition of British design. Three years later, the exhibition *Industrial Design USA* toured Moscow, Leningrad, and Kiev: this sequence vividly reflects Soviet Moscow and Russia-centric policies. More shows of design in countries with advanced market economies (Italy, West Germany, Japan, Belgium, and others) followed in the 1970s. Therefore, *Contemporary Danish Design* was one of the earliest shows of this kind.

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9 Christo, *Cold War on the Home Front*; Fallan, “Milanese Mediations”;
The Challenge of Discoordination and Gigantomania

The exhibition jury included weaver and fabric printer Bodil Bødtker-Næss, ceramic artist Erik Magnussen, furniture manufacturer Axel Thygesen, and three architects: Jens Nielsen, LDK director Benth Salicath, and Ibi Trier Mørch who designed the exhibition. Archival sources do not reveal any criteria for selecting the items to be exhibited. The complete list of those is not available either, but I was lucky to find the list of designers and manufacturers represented at the exhibition in Danish and Russian. The list includes seven categories: 1) lighting; 2) ceramic, porcelain, and glass; 3) furniture; 4) toys and other wooden objects; 5) metalwork; 6) industrial production; 7) textile. Evidently, LDK decided to present a diversity of Danish design and to combine the icons of Danish Modern, such as furniture designed by Hans Wegner and Børge Mogensen or toys by Kay Bojensen, and the new objects of industrial production, such as audio equipment produced by the company Bang & Olufsen.

The most detailed account of the exhibition is a report that Ibi Trier Mørch sent to the Business Development Centre at the Danish Foreign Ministry at the end of the exhibition in January 1970. A shortened version of this document almost immediately appeared in the LDK magazine Dansk Brugskunst. Ibi Trier Mørch’s son, the 25- years old architecture photographer Andreas Trier Mørch, also traveled to Moscow and published his notes on the exhibition in the magazine Arkitekten. However subjective, these three accounts provide valuable first-hand information on the material and technical background of the exhibition.

According to Ibi Trier Mørch’s report, the LDK originally planned the exhibition for the mid-1970. However, because of the celebrations of Lenin’s anniversary in the spring of 1969, the only slot that the Soviet Culture ministry could offer was at the turn of the year, which the Danish side accepted. Consequently, the planning collided with the exhibition Métiers d’art Danois in Brussels, organized by the Danish Foreign Ministry and held in connection with the Danish weeks (apparently, that was another chance for LDK to keep promoting national design after its heyday). The plan, therefore, was to send the exhibition to Moscow in advance in November.

However, this plan went askew. For some bureaucratic reason, shipment of the exhibition material from Copenhagen was delayed until November 15. Instead of sending the three huge containers via Tallinn in Estonia, the exhibition organizers decided that shipping them via Ventspils in Latvia would be faster. Unfortunately, the Soviet Culture Ministry’s Department of Exhibitions had sent its representative to Tallinn to monitor the reception of the containers and further delivery by railways. To make matters worse, the loading capacity in Ventspils turned out to be too small, and the weather was harsh. As a result, the containers got slightly damaged. The holes were repaired with welding and paint during the containers’ stay in Moscow. Fortunately, the contents remained undamaged.

Ibi Trier Mørch describes the unpacking in Moscow as “satisfactory” and the workforce of 8 or 9 men as “friendly and helpful,” though dangerously working without velvet gloves. Furthermore, clearance was complicated. The customs officer Lidia Gus’kova wanted to see and check every single object unpacked, and so the whole process took two full days. The next day and a half were spent delivering the objects to the museum. Therefore, Ibi Trier Mørch and her assistant, decorator Svend Jacobsen, had only nine days to set up the show.

The challenges did not end there. The exhibition venue, the Polytechnic Museum, was one of the oldest science museums in Russia, founded in 1872 to popularize scientific knowledge. Its spacious premises were constructed between 1874 and 1907 after the designs of Ippolit Monighetti and Nikolai Shokhin in Russian Revival style. In the 1950s, the
Museum intensified its exhibition activity, permanently displaying over twenty thousand items related to the history and latest achievements of Soviet science, technology, and industry. In the 1960s, the “Polytech,” as the museum was popularly called, celebrated the success of the Soviet space exploration while also becoming the scene for literary evenings that attracted young poets and became one of the symbols of the so-called “Thaw” era of the softened cultural policies after Stalin’s death. The museum, therefore, could seem a perfect site for displaying Danish design in 1969-70: it had the reputation of being a modern place where one could learn about advanced science and literary aesthetics. In its choice of a science museum rather than a fine arts museum as a venue for the Danish design exhibition, the Soviet Culture Ministry, in fact, followed the example of European science and technology museums that included design objects in their collections and displays. As design historian, Maddalena Dalla Mura, explains, since the middle of the 20th century, these museums became increasingly interested in social aspects of science and technology and their role in everyday life. Therefore, even though they usually had no design curators, science and technology museums displayed designed objects in relation to different social and cultural issues. This tendency became especially strong in the late 1960s thanks to the popularity of theories of design as a social and cultural phenomenon, presented by thinkers such as Tomás Maldonado or Abraham Moles. Presumably, the choice of the Polytech belonged to Soloviev, who was well versed in current design theories.

However, Ibi Trier Mørch doubted the relevance of the premises for their exhibition. The Polytech equally surprised her and her son with its enormous proportions. The four rooms on the 3rd floor, allocated for the exhibition, comprised altogether 760 m². All the measurements, as Ibi Trier Mørch expressed it, were “multiplied by 2”—that is, twice bigger than expected. The windowsills were 2 meters long, the windows’ height was 5 meters, and the ceilings’ height was an impressive 6.5 m. Andreas Trier Mørch remarked that even the power outlets were “solid and magnificent.” The “culture shock” from the Polytech interiors reinforces the stereotypical image of the USSR as a spacious land full of grandiose projects, where everything is of gargantuan scale, both newly constructed and inherited from the Imperial Era. Both mother and son Trier Mørch were probably aware that huge public buildings contrasted with crowded communal apartments, as well as with the tiny prefabricated apartments constructed as part of Nikita Khrushchev’s housing campaign, launched in the late 1950s.

Apparently, in order to soften the oversized dimensions of the room, the foot panels were painted purple, ochre, evergreen, and light ultramarine. Ibi Trier Mørch and Svend Jacobsen did their best to make the exhibits stand out from these overwhelming interiors. “By essentially removing the exhibition stands from the walls and assembling them in groups in the middle of the room, by shading the daylight from the colossal, winter-gray windows, and by laying all the artificial lighting at the height of 2.3 m, we managed to draw attention to the most important—the exhibited objects,” she reported.

The setup process was a continuous struggle with the odd infrastructure—the infrastructure that included objects and people. Even though, as Andreas Trier Mørch noticed, the assisting workers were equipped with little more than “a crowbar and a couple of sledgehammers—also oversized—they used these instruments with diligence and tenacity on everything they got near.” Ibi Trier Mørch, too, mentioned the “satisfactory” work of the “very energetic, friendly and understanding electricians,” but suggested that the parquet was washed with too much water and too rigid brushes, hence its poor quality (Fig. 1).

Her son noticed the difficulty to communicate to the workers how exactly they should handle things: how to arrange the showcases, where to direct

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23 Outline of the history of the Polytech Museum at its official website https://polymus .ru/ru/museum/about/history/
26 Ibid.
the lightning, or on what spot to put this or that chair. The interpreter from Danish to Russian was evidently not of much help, and neither were the six custodians present at the setup. Therefore, the Danish team had to be creative and flexible.

Material infrastructures and human actors hindered and modified smooth shipment and setup of Contemporary Danish Design in Moscow. Borrowing the notion of “technical script” from sociologist Madeleine Akrich, design historian Kjetil Fallan, an author of multiple publications on national and transnational design, characterizes design practice as inscriptions that users rarely interpret as intended. Fallan argues that “there is always the chance that the actors do not play the role the designers ascribe to them.” In the case of the Danish exhibition team in the Polytech, the inscription had to be modified already at the mediation stage: workers, custodians, the customs officer, and the translator failed to follow the script due to misunderstanding or unwillingness. The modest, user-friendly proportions of the classics of Danish Modern—chairs, carpets, dishware, cutlery, toys, as well as more contemporary objects such as the Bang & Olufsen’s radio receiver—looked mismatched with the museum’s huge rooms. While Soviet architecture and design had experienced the revived interest in ergonomics and rational dimensions associated with pre- and post-war modernism, the Polytech represented the late Russian Empire’s grandeur, ill-suited for displaying the manifestly modest Danish design.

Tailoring the Message to the Audience

The exhibition team of several LDK members brought several informational materials, bypassing the prohibitions of the Soviet Culture Ministry, which tended to reject any propositions. The rejection stemmed from discoordination between different offices within the ministry. “It seems that one institution did not know about the decisions of the other. One would say ‘NJET’ [no] before even knowing whether the permission had granted [by...
another institution].” Nonetheless, LDK believed that information was highly important at what Ibi Trier Mørch called “prestige exhibitions,” and that printed materials could provide the needed background knowledge about Danish design culture. Ibi Trier Mørch, who had designed the Warsaw exhibition of 1965, had learned from that experience that the public in socialist countries could be highly interested in learning more. Her daughter, the artist Dea Trier Mørch, who had visited the show, noted that a courier had to be swiftly sent from Copenhagen to Warsaw after the exhibition had already started because the public demanded printed materials.

Therefore, the Danes did bring printed materials to Moscow. These included publications on Danish Modern: the book Contemporary Danish design, issued for the 1960–61 exhibition The Arts of Denmark: Viking to Modern that toured the U. S. in 1960–61, and brochures of the design firm “Kay Bojesen models” that produced wood- and silverware. LDK sent information about the newest development in Danish design, as well: a booklet by the creative workshop of the young designer Ole Jørgensen translated into Russian that presented a transformable desk calendar made of plastic; a booklet about the multifunctional Super-Egg form invented by the polymath Piet Hein; the catalog “Inspiration 68-69” of the furniture manufacturer Fritz Hansen that included both Danish Modern classics and new models; and a set of postcards with furniture pieces of chromium-plated steel, acryl, oxide leather, and oak, designed by Poul Kjærholm for the manufacturer E. Kold Christensen. Yet ordinary visitors could not freely access this material: the limited amount of copies was barely enough for the inquisitive Soviet design professionals, to the dismay of Ibi Trier Mørch. She admitted that the Warsaw lesson had not been learned well enough.

Advertising the exhibition to the broader public was another source of frustration for the exhibition team. During the negotiations in summer 1969, the Soviet Ministry of Culture had promised to provide all the necessary publicity, but they only partially fulfilled that promise. While featuring the vital work of Danish design, the exhibition poster—a magnified fragment of the wool curtain by Paula Tröck hanging in the UN Headquarters in New York—was printed in black and white. The image was, therefore, unappealing and little comprehensible, according to Ibi Trier Mørch. She noticed the poster on the streets and in some museums but argued that a “colorful Danish poster could attract much more attention.” The poster above the Polytech’s entrance did not stand apart from the museum’s other informational materials.

The same image of Trock’s curtain appeared on the cover of a small exhibition catalog, probably intended for distribution among visitors. Only 1,500 copies were published, and they were quickly sold out. LDK pre-ordered 50 copies to distribute among the designers whose production was displayed at the exhibition. The Soviet side agreed to prepare the catalog based on the preliminary materials sent by LDK, including a short introduction by the Danish Culture minister Kristen Helveg Petersen, a more extended introduction by silversmith Anders Hostrup-Pedersen, the LDK chairman, and an essay by Ibi Trier Mørch and the LDK director Bent Salicath. The latter opened with the remark that the cold climate was an essential factor in the special attention to home interiors in Denmark, just as in the USSR. Then they discussed the most famous chapter of Danish design: furniture.

While the typical story of Danish Modern, pitched to potential Western consumers, began with the innovator Kaare Klint and his 1930s Furniture School at the Royal Academy of Fine Arts, the Moscow exhibition’s catalogue did not mention Klint. This is noteworthy considering that Klint’s search for ideal dimensions through measurements and calculations and his striving for the economy of space in furniture could resonate with the importance of...
ergonomics at VNIITE. Instead, Trier Mørch and Salicath began the story of modern Danish furniture with the cooperation between the Cabinetmakers’ Guild and architects that started in 1927 and resulted in yearly exhibitions and competitions for new furniture types. This initiative was supported by the Danish Consumer Cooperative Society which facilitated the production of quality but relatively inexpensive furniture—the trend that later, after World War II, evolved into a full-fledged furniture industry. The emphasis on the high quality of mass-produced furniture reflected LDK’s reorientation from “tradition-honoring functionalism” and close cooperation with the Cabinetmakers’ Guild towards the support of mass production and commercial activities. Symptomatically, Ibi Trier Mørch and Salicath welcomed the recent tendency of the furniture industry to depart from craft traditions and actively use new materials: laminated wood, steel, aluminum, fiberglass, and foam rubber. They argued:

Some people worry that the use of new materials and their innovative processing mean the departure from the hitherto established quality standards. But there is little doubt, that the accumulated experience of production, based on the balance between form, material and function, will also define the work of the new generation, which is still, though, mainly experimental.

Strikingly, the overview did not mention any names of furniture designers or manufacturers. This is in stark contrast to the texts of the catalogs for the exhibitions in North America Design in Scandina-via (1954–57) and The Arts of Denmark (1960–61), which presented designers as celebrities. Supposedly, the Soviet organizers warned Ibi Trier Mørch and Salicath that the Soviet public was interested in socially meaningful design solutions rather than in authorship, in collective achievements rather than in individual fame. It is also possible that the designers’ names were removed from the original text by the translator. To be precise, in the 1960s the publications in the journal Tekhnicheskaia Estetika frequently featured the names of foreign designers, and the reminiscences of VNIITE employees suggest that the idea of a “celebrity designer” was quite appealing among Soviet design professionals. But in practice, design projects at VNIITE were signed by design teams or departments, not by individuals. Presumably, the decision to remove the names stemmed from the Soviet Ministry of Culture to preclude any impression of individualism in Danish design.

The essay includes all the major themes of the late 1960s Soviet design discussions: seeking the balance between functionalism and aesthetic sophistication; experimentation in decorative art and its adaptation for mass production; the involvement of fine artists in designing patterns for everyday objects and the blurring of the line between fine and applied art; the exploration of new materials, in particular plastic. Speaking of textiles, the authors explained that weavers and printers experimented with structures and patterns to adapt their findings to mass production later. The stoneware designers used the material’s inherent qualities to “vividly express their creativity,” and ceramic designers were enthusiastic about “the possibilities of experimenting that are inherent in the material itself.” The silverware design was dominated by architects who tended to neglect decorative elements in favor of “simple and natural” forms that only win from being “polished” in everyday use. The designers of stainless-steel cutlery avoided imitations of traditional forms, characteristic of silver. Modern Danish jewelry tended to be either strictly architectonic or more “freely artistic,” yet always minimalistic in terms of material: it rarely included gems. It seems that LDK used the Moscow exhibition as an occasion to carefully balance the narrative of the mid-century “golden age” and the presentation of new achievements in mass production. Therefore, the catalog essay probably sounded a lot like Soviet discussions on the responsibilities of domestic design even prior to any censorship.

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36 This change is discussed in detail in Hansen, Danish Modern Furniture, 240–317.
37 Sovremennoe khudozhestvennoe konstuirovaniie. Daniia, pp. 11–12.
The catalog frontispiece showed a non-utilitarian and expensive object: a geometric silver necklace designed and produced by Helga and Bent Eksner. The few additional illustrations included both unique and mass-produced objects, such as fiberglass chairs and a table, designed by architect Poul Kjærholm and produced by the manufacturer E. Kold Christensen (1961, Fig. 2); or, from the previous decade, a set of stainless-steel cutlery by the star architect Arne Jacobsen, manufactured by A. Mikkelsen (1968). These objects were supposed to impress the Soviet audience as examples of the Danish capacity to produce high-quality, modest, accessible objects.

The Reception: Excitement, Skepticism, and the Danger of Plagiarism

Ibi Trier Mørch and her son considered the exhibition a success. As at the Warsaw exhibition, visitors had been allowed to touch the objects but, while the Warsaw display had been quite rundown at the end of the show according to Dea Trier Mørch, in Moscow the wear and tear, and the public’s interaction with the objects in general, were less than expected. The calculation of the exhibition’s “walking line,” where the exhibited objects could be seen in the desirable order, failed. The section with jewelry and silver, planned as an effective ending, attracted immediate attention, so the visitors rushed to see it first. The arranged signs with arrows were of little help. But even more unfortunate was the absence of detailed captions for exhibited items resulting from the red tape and complicated negotiations with the Soviet Ministry of Culture. The idea to project slides with images of Danish design objects continuously at the exhibition failed, just like many other Ibi Trier Mørch’s ideas. Ibi Trier Mørch attempted to compensate for these disadvantages with an introductory lecture, “a literacy lesson,” where she showed slides about design objects whose purposes, forms, and materials were “too new for immediate experience.” The lecture was, however, a drop in the sea because only 100 people attended it, many of them employees of VNIITE who had already been well educated in world design trends. Therefore, the exhibition was at odds with the important principle of exhibiting design objects in science and technology museums—in the context of social and cultural life, accompanied by detailed captions and various documents. In the Moscow Polytech Museum, Danish furniture, dishware, toys, radio equipment, etc., stood without contextualization, so the public needed to guess the objects’ production, sale, and functions in Danes’ daily life. According to one photo by Andreas Trier Mørch, his mother tried to partially solve this problem by giving guided tours at the exhibition (Fig. 3).

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40 Dea Trier Mørch, “En dag på Dansk Kunsthaandværk’s udstilling i Warszawa,” 13
The opening happened as planned, with the attendance of the Danish and Soviet Ministers of Culture—Kristen Helveg Petersen and Ekaterina Furtseva (Fig. 4). Both ministers spoke about cultural relations before Mr. Petersen cut the traditional red ribbon. Later the ministers raised their glasses at the opening’s reception after (or probably before) a Danish designer invited Furtseva to sit in a chair with a footrest of his design. I did not succeed identifying this designer, but judging by the photographic likeness, it could be Hans Wegner. About 600 VIPs attended the opening ceremony, before the exhibition opened to the public. Within 16 days, at least 22,000 visitors saw the show—a modest number compared to the 200,000 visitors of the Warsaw exhibition, which probably included guests from other Eastern bloc countries. Nonetheless, Ibi Trier Mørch considered this attendance a success. Though the show was up on the third floor, its closeness to the permanent display on space exploration guaranteed that it could be noticed and attended by many. The late December and early January exhibition period meant many free days around New Year’s. But it was only perceptible on the last days of the exhibition when people were done with the New Year’s celebration.

Ibi Trier Mørch emphasized that delegations of designers from the three Baltic countries, “which are considered best in the sphere of Soviet design,” arrived with the chief purpose of seeing the Danish exhibition. The guestbook entries also mention Odesa in Ukraine and Baku in Azerbaijan. The centralized character of Soviet cultural politics created unequal access to knowledge, including knowledge about foreign design. Especially striking is that no funding was allocated for presenting the exhibition in one or more of the Baltic capitals before or after it arrived in Moscow. This would have been logical and would have spared many specialists a trip to Moscow.

The interest of the specialized public was clear in its questions about the exhibition’s establishment and contents. The visitors asked questions primarily via the translator Valentina, who translated very accurately, judging by the follow-up questions. Most questions were technical, such as: of what sorts of wood were the chairs made? Or, how were they processed? People wanted to know more.
about handicraft vs. industrial production of textiles, the uses of different cutlery, the construction of wheels in the Kevi chair (designed by Jørgen Rasmussen in 1965), and the functions of equipment by the famous electronics company Bang & Olufsen. Louis Poulsen’s small Lampetit was almost worn out during the demonstration.

Unsurprisingly, designers—in groups or individually—showed much interest in Danish design education, organizations, and working conditions. They photographed and sketched a lot at the exhibition (Fig. 5). One jewelry designer visited the exhibition probably seven times and drew all the objects exhibited. Ibi Trier Mørch perceived it as evidence of success but, at the same time, a warning of forthcoming plagiarism. Moreover, she admitted that the Soviet designers already used their knowledge of Danish design to their advantage: during her visit to the Pioneer Palace at Lenin Hills, she noticed a chair with “an unmistakable, though slight, semblance to Arne Jacobsen’s chair No. 3107, designed in 1955 and produced at Fritz Hansen.”44 Ironically, she did not recognize that it was a Finnish chair—the Nikke dining chair by Tapio Wirkkala for Asko, produced in the 1950s.45

Thanks to the translator, Andreas Trier Mørch could understand that the exhibition provoked discussions about “the production relations, raw materials, training and traditions” and that “these questions often developed into discussions about political and economic relations.”46 His photos from the show, indeed, demonstrate the visitors’ keen interest and active, though careful, involvement with the objects. The exhibits that drew probably the most attention were beanbags accompanied by tape recorders playing music. This cozy corner, arranged by Bang & Olufsen, attracted not only “a

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45 Viktor Egerov et al., Moskovskii dvorets pionerov (Moscow: Izdatel’stvo literatury po stroitel’stvu, 1964), pp. 5–19
46 Trier Mørch, ’Moderne dansk design i Moskva’, 166.
bunch of Moscow hippies,” but also Red Army soldiers who, as the photo suggests, saw this type of furniture for the first time and were curious to try sitting on it. “Rarely,” Andreas remarked, an exhibition is observed so thoroughly, with attention to details. Primarily there were artists and professionals, for whom information from Western Europe was rare. However, there were also laypeople who, naturally, viewed it as a political and material manifestation. The reaction this exhibition set in motion will have significance far beyond the current situation and multifarious effects can emerge from it in the future.47

Notably, Contemporary Danish design was not only a “prestige exhibition” (to use Ibi Trier Mørch’s expression) but also a chance for LDK to satisfy its commercial interest. While the objects on display were not for sale, just like they had not been for sale at the Warsaw exhibition, the Danes wanted to probe the opportunities for wholesale trade with Soviet institutions. Trade organizations visited the show several times with an interest in buying furniture for hotels and the Black Sea resorts. However, it was not always easy for the Danes to get more precise information about who and from where they were. Several times, interested visitors sought contact with the Danish trade attaché. Through the Danish embassy, the Danish group of designers, manufacturers, and LDK employees had contact with Soviet trade organizations, such as Vneshposyltorg, Exlotlites, and Raznoexport. Many representatives of Danish companies Dansk Designs, Den Kongelige Porcelainfabrik, Cencreta Talent, and others met with Soviet trade representatives, who found Danish production attractive but too expensive. The primary attention went to the more expensive furniture categories for restaurants and hotels, such as upholstered chairs and sofas. Moreover, the show served as an introduction to the upcoming Danish Industrial exhibition that would take place in Moscow in June 1970, in which LDK planned to participate.

While the Danish Ambassador Anker Svart was skeptical about the selection of objects for the exhibition, worrying that they would be too “decadent” in the eyes of the Soviet viewers, the guestbook shows many positive responses. Unfortunately, I do not have access to the original book. The Danish translation, attached to Ibi Trier Mørch’s report, offers a diversity of reactions, which suggests that all the entries were translated rather than only positive ones. The terms “simple,” “elegant,” “modern,” and “original” run through the entries. V. Kustyova, Chief Engineer of the Russian Socialist Republic’s Ministry of Housing and Utilities, complained about the absence of detailed tags for the objects, which were all new and exciting to her. A visitor from Klaipeda, Lithuania, regretted that the items displayed were not for sale, because they would have liked to buy one of these “original, simple and at the same time beautiful” objects. Visitors from Baku, Azerbaijan, remarked that “it would be delightful to visit Denmark,” and someone from the design department of the Latvian Academy of Art expressed their gratitude to the exhibition organizers. An architect and artist from Ukraine (whose name the translator could not decipher) wrote: “The exhibition is great. Interesting interiors, attractive services, and original jewelry. It would be good to have a booklet or a photo as a reminder of the exhibition. I wish you further luck, dear friends, in your future
work in design. Hopefully, it is not the last time I have met you.” Some commentators merely exclaimed, “Original! Inspiring!” or even “Very! Very! Very!” (in English). Two people wrote in Danish. There were also two comments in Latvian, which, unfortunately, could not be translated due to the lack of an appropriate translator.

Only one comment was explicitly negative, questioning the correspondence between the exhibition’s name and content. An “industrial-graphic designer” found the title “Contemporary Danish Design” overblown: “The exhibits are duplicates of the best German, French and American products (. . .) the exhibition itself is devoid of national flavor, which normally characterizes design.” However, another commentator responded:

Here come Soviet ‘industrial-graphic designers,’ who draw sketches and take photos, and then sit down and write that ‘the exhibition shows the replicas of the best examples of English, American, and other production.’ Does this not, in fact, apply to Soviet design? In my view, the exhibition is exciting. There are many original ideas and much talent.48

This confrontation in the comments also recalls the problem of plagiarism, raised by Ibi Trier Mørch in her report. While the Danes worried that poor-quality copies of their designs would soon appear throughout the USSR, the Soviet commentator tried to use the accusation of plagiarism to diminish the exhibition. Supposedly, Ibi Trier Mørch and her colleagues could hardly be offended: Danish design professionals did not necessarily hide their inspiration from other models, but always stressed that they creatively reworked foreign ideas, instead of simply copying the forms. In the introduction to Contemporary Danish Design, architect Arne Karlsen stated:

Danish design is not decidedly national; no material can be said to be a Danish specialty; we import the major part in our raw materials and, for that matter, also the artistic ideals to which these materials are worked up in our workshops and in our factories. No major artistic currents or worldwide influence ever emanated from Denmark. Our domestic heritage is our sober approach to the ideas reaching us from other countries and the sober manner in which we adapt them to our way of life.49

It is difficult to guess what the unkind commentator meant by the "national flavor”—apparently not folk ornaments because simple modernist forms have been celebrated in Soviet design since the late 1950s. It could well be that the "industrial-graphic designer" in fact wanted to show off their familiarity with Western design trends and to appear as an equal to Danish designers, rather than as a naïve admirer. Or probably this commentator had been well versed in contemporary design trends and expected to see more contemporary objects, equipment, and photographs, suitable for the late 1960s international debates about designers’ social responsibility.

The review of the exhibition for the official VNIITE bulletin Technical Aesthetics also presented criticism but more balanced and justified.50 It was written by two young employees of the Department of household goods at VNIITE, Vladimir Paperny and Aleksandr Riabushin.51 They worked in a section of the Department concerned not with the immediate needs of the industry but with long-term prognosis of design trends suitable for the future socialist society.52 The employees of this "prognosis section" followed the Ulm School of Design theorists in West Germany, such as Tomás Maldonado, Gui Bonsiepe, and Abraham Moles,53 and tended to regard environments, rather than singular objects, as ideal end products of their work. They were fascinated

50 In an email correspondence from 21.03.2017, Vladimir Paperny told me that he does not remember the exhibition itself but can definitely say that he and Riabushin were the true authors, while the other colleagues added their names to meet the number of publications required for the approval for the PhD defence.
by the suggestion of the British architectural critic Reyner Banham that future homes should consist of flexible hardware without traditional walls.\textsuperscript{54} Paperny and Riabushin expected to see the newest changes in Danish design rather than the classics of Danish Modern. While complimenting the elegance and tastefulness of the exhibition design, Paperny and Riabushin expressed their disappointment at the modest size and scope of the exhibition. They hoped to see more examples of industrially produced goods of different functions, such as lighting for different zones of living space. They missed seeing models of photographs of interiors where all the things correspond to each other aesthetically and functionally. They would be happy to see even the old example of such interiors, for example, those designed by the famous architect Arne Jacobsen. Riabushin and Paperny eagerly followed the ideas of Western avant-garde design collectives such as British Archigram or Austrian Haus- Rucker-Co, and later, in 1974, they designed a futuristic project of “Domestic Information Machine.”\textsuperscript{55} Therefore, they were probably surprised not to see the visionary “Cyberspace” sketches by the young Danish designers Susanne Ussing and Carl Hoff.\textsuperscript{56}

But at least, Paperny and Riabushin appreciated the display of such modern objects as a radio receiver and amplifier by Bang & Olufsen, modular aluminum furniture by world-famous architect Jørn Utzon, and bathroom equipment by Arne Jacobsen and Teit Weylandt. The review ended on a neutral note that the combination of functionality, the mastery of processing materials, mass reproducibility of designs and the continuity with old traditions place Danish design “to one of the most prominent positions.”\textsuperscript{57}

Studies of exhibiting Western consumer goods to the viewers from socialist bloc countries, as Oksana Nagornaia noted,\textsuperscript{58} initially focused on the notions of Western ‘success’ and the admitted ‘failure’ of socialist governments to satisfy the populations’ consumer demands. More recent studies demonstrated the diversity of responses to the showcases of ‘consumer paradise’: for example, Susan Emily Reid argues that quite many Soviet viewers of the famous American exhibition in Moscow in 1959 could be sincere in their disappointment that the U. S. did not demonstrate enough achievements in science and technology.\textsuperscript{59} Paperny and Riabushin, however, were not too naïve about the moral and technical superiority of Soviet socialism and were very highly critical of Soviet design and industrial production. Therefore, their review does not read like a Soviet bravado. I would argue that they did have a point: they identified the weakness of LDK’s exhibition strategy during a crisis in Daish design. The review suggested that combining the classics of Danish Modern and a few mass-produced goods made of synthetic materials was not enough. While the general public was fascinated with the previously unseen icons of Danish mid-century design and a few recent production examples, young design professionals saw the exhibition as belonging to the past. For them, a contemporary design exhibition needed to show new and critical approaches to design as a complex, socially aware activity.

\textbf{Conclusion}

Exhibiting in Moscow at the turn of 1970 was, apparently, a challenging task for LDK. A team of Danish design professionals needed to make the display comprehensible to the Soviet Public and to prevent the impression that Danish design belonged “to the decadent capitalist world.”\textsuperscript{60} LDK approached the organization of the exhibition with


\textsuperscript{57} Papernyi and Riabushin, “Raboty datskikh khudozhnikov-konstruktorov v Moskve,” 28.

\textsuperscript{58} Oksana Nagornaia, “Vitriny sovetskikh dostizhenii: SSSR na mezhduunarodnykh vystavakh tovarov narodnogo potrebleniia,” in Sovetskaia kul’turnaia diplomatiia v usloviah khludnom sveta, ed. by Oksana Nagornaia (Moscow: Russpen, 2018), 86–95


\textsuperscript{60} Rigsarkivet, idenrigsministeriet: Gruppeordnede sager (1945-1972) 8999: 69 A, l. 7.
a mix of suspicion and interest in making Danish design a recognizable brand in the Soviet Union. At the same time, *Contemporary Danish Design* in Moscow was one event in a series of LDK’s exhibition activities in a period of crisis. Just a few years ago, the unity between artisans and architects withered away, as LDK became more interested in commercial success than in promoting the “timeless” handicraft tradition. The available documents about the exhibition’s preparation and contents suggest that the exhibition jury opted for a compromise: to highlight the classics of Danish Modern while also showing the achievements of industrial production and the success in working with modern materials such as chromium-plated steel, fiberglass, and plastics. Ibi Trier Mørch and her colleagues could assume that such compromise would satisfy the Soviet public unfamiliar or insufficiently familiar with Danish design. Judging by her report to the Danish Foreign Ministry, she believed that LDK reached its goal and achieved success in spite of bureaucratic, logistical, and communicational difficulties.

Was it indeed a success or, on the contrary, the unwitting demonstration of stagnation? It depends on the criteria for evaluation. LDK certainly succeeded in attracting a relatively high attendance from across the USSR and, if we are to believe the guestbook, impressing many viewers. This relative success could be impossible without the invisible labor of workers, cleaners, and translators. Yet we still do not know how many visitors were confused in the absence of captions and documentation explaining how Danish design answers to the changing needs of different population groups and society in general and how the exhibition corresponded to the profile of the Polytechnic Museum. It is also unclear to what extent the VNIITE employees shared the disappointment of their young and ambitious colleagues Paperny and Riabushin, who reviewed the exhibition. Finally, according to Ibi Trier Mørch’s report, none of the Soviet trade organizations concluded sales agreements with any Danish manufacturers during the show. The afterlife of Danish Modern in the USSR was, therefore, far from a triumph. But at the very least, as Andreas Trier Mørch noticed, the show provoked a discussion between the visitors and the Danish curators about design in the social and political context. This spontaneous conversation was possible because just like the Polish exhibition visitors in 1965, the Soviet public in 1969–70 was eager to “read the display between the lines.”