

TOWARD  
A PRATT MUSEUM  
OF DESIGN



Karim Rashid, faculty  
Garbo Waistbasket, Umbra, 1996  
Photo courtesy of Karim Rashid Design

**Pratt**

*Introduction by Hampton C. Wayt*

Pratt Institute's industrial design program is arguably the most influential of its kind in the United States. Yet its historical role in establishing industrial design education in America is almost completely absent from the annals of design history. The history of American industrial design education as it is presently written primarily credits the teachings and practices of the Bauhaus as the greatest influence on the field. This accreditation, however, contradicts Bauhaus historians' acknowledgement in recent decades that, although the European institution was highly influential in the realms of crafts, architecture and with significant contributions to photography, despite its best intentions its pedagogy on the whole failed to produce designers capable of creating advanced products for mass manufacture—the ultimate goal of industrial design education and a stated purpose of the school.<sup>1</sup>



Donald R. Dohner, faculty  
GG1 Class Locomotive Study, Pennsylvania RR, 1934  
Photo courtesy of Hampton C. Wayt



Read Viemeister, Budd Steinhilber, Tucker Madawick, alumni  
J. Gordon Lippincott, faculty  
Tucker '48 Automobile Tucker Corp., 1947

The origins of Pratt's Industrial Design Department, which was established in 1930—a full seven years before several prominent Bauhaus educators (including Walter Gropius and Laszlo Moholy-Nagy) first brought the famed school's doctrines to America's shores in person—can be traced to the pioneering vision of one man: Donald Roscoe Dohner. Dohner, who became interested in merging “art and industry” in the late 1910s, fifteen years before industrial design was first publically acknowledged as a profession, was arguably America's preeminent industrial designer at the time as the art director for the expansive Westinghouse Electric and Manufacturing Company. It was he who inspired his personal friend and director of Pratt's School of Fine and Applied Arts, James C. Boudreau, to establish Pratt's new program. Boudreau had Dohner make numerous trips to Brooklyn in the first years of the program to lecture on his real-world factory experiences and innovations to the school's students.<sup>2</sup>

Two years later, in 1932, Dohner gained an important design ally in Alexander Kostellow, a painting professor who became an industrial design convert upon seeing an exhibition of Dohner's Westinghouse work featuring murals and household products made from normally blasé industrial Micarta laminate. The pair even started an industrial design and "sales research" firm called Dohner & Kostellow in downtown Pittsburgh shortly after the former left Westinghouse in 1934. Their business venture was short-lived, however, for by 1936 Boudreau lured Dohner to New York to become the head of Pratt's Industrial Design Department.<sup>3</sup>

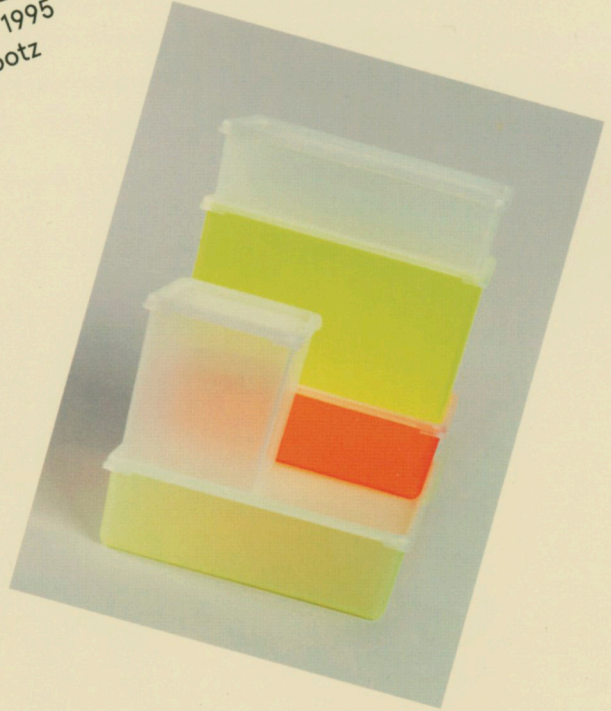


*Wesley Junker, alumnus, with Egmont Arens  
KitchenAid Mixer Model 3B, Hobart Corp., ca. 1940*

By 1939, Dohner had recruited both his former business partner, as well as Kostellow's sculptor wife, Rowena Reed—the latter's name forever linked with the school's legacy—from Pittsburgh to create a new supplementary design curriculum and foundation-year program called

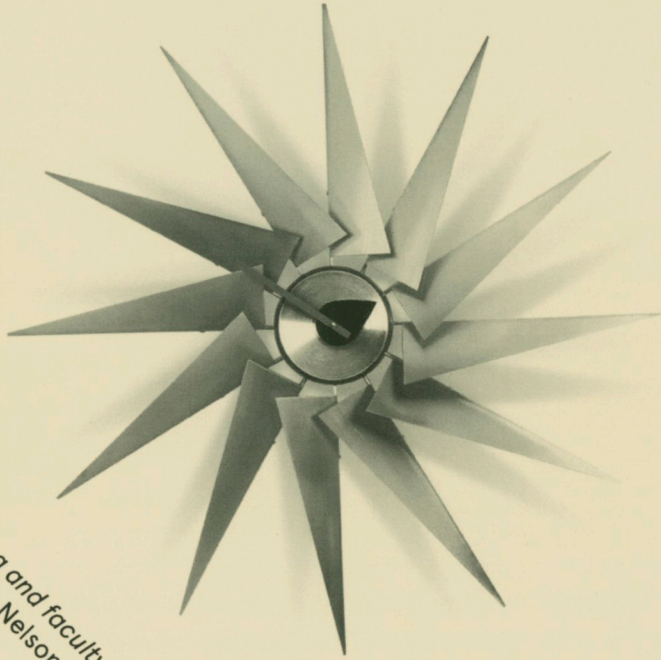
Design and Structure. Combined, Dohner, the Kostellows, and many other fine Pratt educators not named here, secured Pratt's reputation by producing dozens of successful industrial designers and design educators from 1930 onward.<sup>4</sup>

*Constantin Boym, faculty, and Laurene Leon, alumna  
Use It Containers, Authentics, 1995  
Photo courtesy of Antoine Bootz*



The failure of the Bauhaus to do likewise, first in Europe and later in America at Moholy-Nagy's New Bauhaus (later the Institute of Design) established in 1937, seems to stem from the fact that its educators lacked any real mass manufacturing experience. This factor, combined with an emphasis on handicraft and theory resulted in the creation of numerous unique crafts artists and architects, but few industrial designers. Pratt, on the other hand, had Dohner, whose vast experience was parlayed into a curriculum where students learned to combine tangible and intangible factors such as environment, function, materials, tools and processes, economics, appearance, and psychology to create products that would appeal to the widest possible audience. Dohner termed this approach "designing for mass acceptance."<sup>5</sup>

Another area where the Bauhaus' program provided no precedent for Pratt's educational system was in their differing approaches to form development. Although the Bauhaus encouraged experimentation, they did so primarily in inflexible mediums such as wood and metal, thereby minimizing their students' full sculptural exploration in regard to product design. Pratt, in comparison, prioritized the use of Plasticine (modeling clay) in their product development, believing that 3-dimensional objects should be developed in a 3-dimensional medium as opposed to working out a design on paper and merely transferring it into a 3-dimensional format after the fact, which was a common industry practice at the time.<sup>6</sup>



*Lucia DeRespini, alumna and faculty  
Model 2240 Turbine Clock, Nelson Associates, 1957*

Other points could be discussed as well, but unfortunately for Pratt, its history—and legacy—have only begun to be touched on by design education historians. At present, there is no Pratt industrial design archive, leaving the school's alumni with few options for saving their life's work. As a result, valuable historical materials vital for historians to

understand Pratt's contribution in its full historical context have already been lost to landfills, and without the implementation of an enduring repository will continue to find their way there.

It is with this sentiment and appreciation of the Pratt tradition, while working in a more diverse and inclusive way in the development of the school's future generations of designers, that Constantin Boym, Chair of the Department of Industrial Design at Pratt, has initiated this exhibition. The works displayed here are by alumni, teachers, and other members of the Pratt community. The works by such notable designers as Charles Pollock, Bruce Hannah, Eva Zeisel, Gerald Gulotta, Morison Cousins, Tucker Viemeister, Karim Rashid, Harry Allen, and many others are but a small sampling of the extensive portfolio that Pratt's numerous successful alumni and educators have bestowed upon the world. It is a reminder of the vast reach the school's Industrial Design Department has had on society, and that its graduates' contributions—past, present, and future—are worthy of remembrance.

1 For the latest scholarship on the myths and realities of the Bauhaus, see Barry Bergdoll and Leah Dickerman, *Bauhaus 1919–1933: Workshops for Modernity* (New York: Museum of Modern Art, 2009).

2 Donald R. Dohner, "Designing for Mass Acceptance," *Industrial Arts* (UK), Winter 1936, 253–256; "Pratt's Art School Goes Ultra-Modern," *Brooklyn Daily Eagle*, Oct. 2, 1930, 9; John J. O'Neill, "Efficiency Enhances Mechanical Beauty," *Brooklyn Daily Eagle*, Oct. 27, 1930, 19.

3 Rowena Reed credited Dohner's Micarta work, which dates to 1932, for inspiring Alexander Kostellow's interest in industrial design. See both Bruce Hannah and Jonathan Yarus, *Rowena Reed Kostellow: 50 Years of Design* (1938–1988), filmed Oct. 1986 at Pratt Institute, Brooklyn, NY, video, 10:17–14:55, <http://rowenafund.org/resources/resources-intro.html> (accessed Aug. 30, 2017), and "More 'Art in Industry' at Carnegie Tech," *Pittsburgh Post-Gazette*, April 4, 1932, 12; For the notice of Dohner & Kostellow's opening, see *Blast Furnace & Steel Plant*, May, 1934, 289.

4 In Alexander Kostellow's article, "Design and Structure Program of the Pratt Institute Art School," in *Design*, May 1940, he credits James Boudreau for bringing him and Rowena Reed to the school, although Rowena Reed later credited Dohner—the latter supported by the fact that Boudreau left Pittsburgh before the Kostellos moved to the city, negating the likelihood that they knew each other.

5 Dohner, "Mass Acceptance."

6 Laszlo Moholy-Nagy, *the new vision: Fundamentals of design, painting, sculpture, architecture* (New York: W. W. Norton, 1938); Donald R. Dohner, "Donald R. Dohner," *PM*, Aug–Sept. 1938, not paginated.

For more information about the Industrial Design Department, visit our website [www.pratt.edu](http://www.pratt.edu) or contact us at [id@pratt.edu](mailto:id@pratt.edu).

Todd Bracher, *alumnus*  
Alodia Bar Stool, Capellini, 2010  
Photo courtesy of Capellini

