The exhibition was organized by Donald Albrecht, an independent curator and Curator of Architecture and Design at the Museum of the City of New York, with assistance from Cathy Henderson and Helen Baer at the Harry Ransom Center.

Cover photo credit: Norman Bel Geddes, Motor Car No. 9 (without tail fin), ca. 1933. Image courtesy of the Edith Lutyens and Norman Bel Geddes Foundation.

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When you drive on an interstate highway, attend a multimedia Broadway show, or watch a football game in an all-weather stadium, you owe a debt of gratitude to Norman Bel Geddes (1893–1958). Geddes was both a visionary and a pragmatist who had a significant role in shaping not only modern America but also the nation’s image of itself as leading the way into the future. Geddes was a polymath who had no academic or professional training in the activities he mastered—designing stage sets, costumes, and lighting; creating theater buildings, offices, nightclubs, and houses; and authoring prescient books and articles.

Geddes believed that art, as well as architecture and design, could make people’s lives psychologically and emotionally richer. He influenced the behavior of American consumers and helped make industrial and theater design into modern businesses. Believing that communication was key to shaping the modern world, Geddes popularized his vision of the future through drawings, models, and photographs. Of his utopian predictions, Geddes’s best-known project was the Futurama exhibit in the General Motors “Highways and Horizons” pavilion at the 1939–1940 New York World’s Fair. It was an immense model of America, circa 1960, seen by 27,500 visitors daily who exited with a pin proclaiming “I Have Seen the Future.”

**I HAVE SEEN THE FUTURE: NORMAN BEL GEDDES DESIGNS AMERICA**


**SETTING THE STAGE 1916–1927**
In the initial phase of his professional career, Geddes focused on theater design and theater spaces. Geddes adapted for the American stage the principles of the so-called New Stagecraft movement in Europe, which aimed to free the theater from the strictures of bourgeois realism and to create settings for a new generation of playwrights who were exploring psychological and emotional depth in their work.

**INDUSTRIOUS DESIGN 1927–1937**
Eager to move beyond theater and broaden his influence over American society, Geddes branched out in new directions in the late 1920s, adapting his flair for theater to architecture and interior design, pioneering the new field of industrial design, and popularizing streamlining as a design concept with his book *Horizons* (1932).

**A BIGGER WORLD 1937–1945**
In the late 1930s Geddes sought to reshape the entire American landscape. When Geddes was asked to create an ad campaign for a new form of gasoline, he envisioned a Shell Oil “City of Tomorrow.” With this project, pitchman Geddes became urban visionary, focusing on decentralization as key to the improved city.

**FUTURAMA 1939–1940**
Geddes’s Futurama installation at the 1939–1940 New York World’s Fair, dedicated to “building the world of tomorrow,” was one of the fair’s most popular attractions. This feat of imagination captured the national consciousness and highlighted Geddes’s talents as a modeler, futurist, and urban planner.

**TOTAL LIVING 1945–1958**
No longer at the epicenter of American industrial design after World War II, Geddes nonetheless remained a visionary who was involved in virtually every field that defined Cold War America, from television to suburbia to urban renewal.

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