

Press release

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Tupperware / plastic fantastic I know you'll be excited!

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Gemeentemuseum Den Haag

There she stands, smiling out at you from the kitchen sink. Perhaps a bit less voluptuous and definitely a lot more lady-like than Marilyn Monroe, but equally blonde and slim-waisted: happy, successful and a good housewife! This is Tupperware's American Dream as it was born in the late 1940s and can still be seen in advertisements from that period. The success of Tupperware was due in the first instance to the genius of Earl Tupper (1907-1983); his Tupper Plastics company began life manufacturing parts for gas masks and navy signal lamps. Soon, however, it switched to producing practical, no-nonsense plastic containers, beakers, cutlery and other household products, marketed in a way which – amazingly enough – actually contributed to women's liberation. From 3 April 2010, pastel-coloured Tupperware is on display in the Gemeentemuseum.

Tupperware's commercial success was due in large part to saleswoman Brownie Wise (1913-1992). It was she who invented the famous Tupperware party plan, a totally new idea which allowed housewives to achieve their own income by selling Tupperware. They could look after their families all day and work in the evening at the famous Tupperware parties, selling plastic containers to other women in an unthreatening domestic setting. Selling Tupperware was an innocent and acceptable occupation. It helped make women in America stronger and more independent, as witness a period poster showing a cheerful young housewife who has made enough money selling Tupperware to buy a brand-new car.

Tupperware is an industrial product made to serve as a practical adjunct to domestic life. The company's success has never been due to any contribution by high-flying designers or any luxury image. Tupperware is attractive and convenient. Its simple cheerfulness is the great strength of the well-known plastic utensils, with their usually rounded forms and pastel colours like mint green and pink. As the exhibition shows, the company's range exhibits great uniformity of design, but not of colour: many of the objects recur time after time in ever-changing hues.

Tupperware is a splendid example of how a plastics manufacturer could exploit the positive post-war mood to become a company capable of contributing to the emancipation of women and the development of American society. This spring, the Gemeentemuseum shows how Tupperware from the 1940s, '50s and '60s – with original packaging and publicity materials – became part of the American Dream and the cultural history of the Western World.

Note to editors:

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