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## LAMP M57 - JULES WABBES - GENERAL DECORATION

### JULES WABBES 50th ANNIVERSARY

Jules Wabbes was a Belgian designer who had an international career during his lifetime. Born in Brussels in 1919, he was first a photographer and an antique dealer before becoming an interior designer and creating his own furniture and objects. He participated for the first time in the Milan Triennale in 1957 where he won a silver medal for his slatted furniture system and his lamp. In 1958 he was present at the Expo in various projects and he obtained a gold medal at the 1960 Triennale. The participation in its various fairs gave him a recognition among specialists and increased its success among its clientele, which consisted of institutions as well as private individuals: the American State Department, Science Ministry, Euratom, the house of the architect Cuisinier in Brussels, to name a few.

Jules Wabbes is known for his timeless simple shapes, the quality of his materials, both wood and metal, and the care taken in the manufacture of his objects down to the smallest detail. His work was the subject of an important retrospective in 2012 at the Centre for Fine Arts (Bozar).

Unfortunately, in 1974, the designer died prematurely at the age of 54 while completing the construction of the Générale de Banque, and the student housing in the new university of Louvain-la-Neuve. 2024 is its anniversary year, as we celebrate the 50th anniversary of its death with the edition of a new lamp whose prototype had disappeared.

## GENERAL DECORATION

General *Decoration* (GD) was founded by Jules Wabbes in 1969 to produce (manufacture and distribute) its metal lamps and accessories. Wabbes had already created a company in 1957, Mobilier Universel, to be able to manufacture his models as he wished, but also to have the choice not only of materials, but also of craftsmen and thus control the quality of the objects. 1969 was a prolific year, as Wabbes created new models of lamps and objects in brass and bronze, also in cast iron especially for his new company.

After the death of its creator, General Decoration continued to publish certain models, it was necessary to fulfill the orders in progress. But little by little, activity slowed down. Marie Wabbes, Jules Wabbes' wife, was determined to keep the company alive at all costs, but none of the rights holders had the skills to continue running the business as before. Marie Ferran-Wabbes took care of the archives and the historical part of her father's work, but the manufacture of the objects required other expertise and a total investment.

## CAROLINE & VINCENT COLET

In 2014, when Vincent Colet, who was a cabinetmaker and antique dealer, showed interest in GD, the family knew that they had found the ideal person to be able to continue making Jules Wabbes' creations. Vincent Colet was very familiar with the objects created by Jules Wabbes, as he had been friends with the family since childhood and he had dismantled these objects in order to be able to restore them. Assisted by his wife Caroline, a graduate of a design school (CAD) who has a career as a decorator in the cinema. The Wabbes family had found the perfect tandem.

The company General Decoration publishes 70 objects, lamps, coat racks, coat hooks, andirons, ashtrays, door handles, furniture and also some furniture such as the wooden end table or the trestle table. But GD's catalog has expanded to include objects previously published by Mobilier Universel. GD only works with local artisans. Everything is made in Belgium and not simply assembled on the territory, which makes the current editions rare, numbered and signed.

## M57 LAMP

The lamp named M57 by Vincent and Caroline for Milan 1957 was created to be exhibited at the XI Triennale di Milano in the Belgian section dedicated to industrial aesthetics. The decoration and layout of the Belgian section was entrusted to the architects Lucien Kroll and Charles Vandenhove. The Belgian section adjoined those of Japan and Austria. A wide variety of objects were on display: guns, milking machine,

ceramics by Pierre Caille, Antoine de Vinck, vases from Val-Saint-Lambert and the horse Bayard by Olivier Strebelle. Jules Wabbes exhibited three tables, three bookcases, a desk and a lamp. The furniture was part of what he called his "slatted furniture system." His creations, both the furniture and the lamp, were awarded a silver medal by an international jury.

The lamp, which at the time was simply called a "double-position lighting fixture", was known only from photographs, in particular those of the CoBra artist, Serge Vandercam, who had illustrated a small catalogue of the Belgian section.

The lamp that had been exhibited in Milan had disappeared. Despite its spectacular dimensions, the beauty of its design, the light filtered by fins that varied according to the position of the foot, the lamp had never been marketed, because it had a technical problem. It was heating up. This is a difficult technical problem to solve with incandescent bulbs.

For the retrospective exhibition at Bozar in 2012, a photograph by Jules Wabbes presenting his lamp at the Triennale was chosen as a poster. Was the lamp going to be found in the hype? Alas, nothing, the dual-position light fixture had not reappeared.

Another mystery surrounded this lamp. What was she made of? In a 1958 article by Léon-Louis SOSSET<sup>1</sup>, the caption of the photo reads: "Stainless steel lamp with dual position (direct and indirect lighting)." This error has been repeated in the publications. It is much more likely, however, that the lamp was made of a copper alloy (brass) like the first lamps created by Jules Wabbes.

A lot of unknowns for this lamp, no plans, no precise descriptions, only a few period photographs. But thanks to the synergy, the will and the passion of several people, thanks also to the evolution of technology, the M57 was able to see the light of day in brushed brass with nickel-plated brass fins and LED bulbs that do not heat up and diffuse a light but a warm light.

## DUPLEX STUDIO

For the creation of the plans, 2D, 3D and then two models and the manufacture of this object that was only known from photographs, Caroline and Vincent Colet called on a studio of designers interested in sustainable objects who mastered digital techniques. Thus, the studio, more particularly Gaston Golstein, head of design, accompanied the birth of this lamp at every stage until the work of the craftsman Cédric Leurquin and the last assembly and control carried out by Vincent Colet.

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<sup>1</sup> *Our furniture designers. J. Wabbes*, in *Guide Intérieur Gids*, 70th year, n°482, Jan. 1958, p. 4.