

Modernism Decorative Arts Gallery

The term Modernism commonly applies those forward looking architects, designers and artisans who, from the 1880s on, forged a new and diverse vocabulary principally to escape Historicism, the tyranny of previous historical styles.

Modernism

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Modernism: Modernist Design 1880-1940, Alastair Duncan
The Norwest Collection, Norwest Corporation, Minneapolis 1998

Arts and Crafts – 1875-1915

Arts and Crafts: A movement that sought to restore the medieval tradition of handicraft in reaction to the spread of mass production, originating in late 19th century Great Britain. Designs were based on simple forms and natural materials, as much for purposes of social reform as for aesthetic reasons.

In America as well as in Britain, the virtues of handcrafted objects—straightforward design, natural materials and enduring construction techniques—were embraced. The values of hearth and home—idyllic domesticity—and the virtues of honesty and simplicity became the predominant themes, nature being the constant source of inspiration. In America, it was also known as Mission style and Prairie School.

Art Nouveau – 1880-1910

Art Nouveau [art noo-VOH], New Art as first 20th century style, inheriting the great traditions of French color and form, fed further by Europe's craze fed by the craze for *Japonisme*, a style imitating the style and motifs of Japanese art. A style characterized by sensual linear designs based on organic form derived largely from nature. Familiar motifs include curvilinear elements, sinuous contours of tendrils, floral arabesques and whiplash lines, and later, exaggerated embellishment. Its curving lines and floral ornamentation soon spread to America as well, chiefly through ceramic and glass designs.

Wiener Werkstätte - 1903-1933

Wiener Werkstätte: [VEEN-er VEHRK-shtet-teh] (German for "Vienna Workshop")

A firm established in 1903 as an association of artists and craftspeople working together to manufacture fashionable household goods. The firm was an offshoot of the late 19th century Vienna Secession, a group of artists and architects who sought to establish a "new art" for the new century. Simplified shapes, geometric patterns, and minimal decoration characterized Wiener Werkstätte products. Together, Josef Hoffman and Koloman Moser founded the Wiener the Viennese Workshop and Production Cooperative of Art Works in Vienna in 1903. By 1905 it had over a hundred craftsmen, its forte being handmade metalware whose reductive style belied its dependence on hand production.

De Stijl - 1917-1928

Dutch for The Style, De Stijl [deh STILE] was the name of a group of artists and architects in post-WWI Holland who gathered around the largely theoretical architect Theo van Doesburg. During the tumultuous decade following World War I, De Stijl artists set out to create a universal style in painting, architecture and design, using rectangles and squares in flat planes of bold primary colors and black, gray and white, all carefully orchestrated with straight lines.

Bauhaus - 1919-1933

Bauhaus: [BOW (like "how")-house] combines the root of the German verb bauen (to build) with haus (house). An art school founded by architect Walter Gropius in Weimar Germany, which became the seat of the Modernist movement through its efforts to reconcile principles of design with industrial mass production. The movement was a distillation of the Modern movement and fundamentalist design ethic - form follows function. Under Gropius the Bauhaus became an art school of immense creativity and influence. The approach to design was to stress aesthetic fundamentals and strive for geometrically pure forms, but unlike the practitioners of the Arts and Crafts movement, machines were not disdained. Some of the greatest painters, graphic designers, architect/designers and thinkers of the period participated in the movement.

Art Deco - 1920-1940

Art Deco was a style that prevailed during the first and second world wars, borrowing motifs from a wide range of sources for sleek, bold designs. The style evolved, especially in America, into a strongly futuristic look. The Stock Market Crash of 1929 served as the Great Divide between the '20s and the '30s, and between European and American Art Deco designs. The distinct moods of the two decades dramatically affected the arts of each. The '20s, characterized by voluptuous interiors, curvilinear forms, exotic materials and outlandish designs gave way in the '30s (generally referred to as the Art Moderne phase) to rectilinear forms, sleek streamlined finishes, synthetic materials and an infatuation with speed, dynamism and futuristic Buck Rogers elements.