

MODERNISM

& Portraiture

In the 1920s, artists stretched the possibilities of portraiture, freeing the art from its conventions with unexpected portrayals of fellow bohemians and even the first “selfies.” The advent and spread of modern psychology encouraged artists to delve deeper into their subjects, introduce unconventional colors, and explore abstraction. Photographers experimented with strangely unfamiliar cropping and novel viewpoints.

MODERNISM

& Landscape

For burgeoning numbers of city dwellers, the landscape was increasingly manmade, spanned by bridges, festooned with factories and grain elevators, and spiked with skyscrapers—wonders of modern engineering that transformed 20th-century cities. New York City sprouted an especially rich crop of buildings, which artists celebrated, distorted, or both.

MODERNISM

& Abstraction

To capture the unprecedented experience of modern life, artists in the early decades of the 1900s felt compelled to abandon their usual methods. Realistic depictions of a landscape, the body, or an array of objects (a still life) gave way to fragmented spaces, bold colors, and simplified forms. Abstraction became the visual language of a new age. The Armory Show, held in 1913 in New York, was a major catalyst on this side of the Atlantic, introducing many Americans to the modern and abstract art of the European avant-garde.

MODERNISM

& Design

Starting in the early 1900s, designers eagerly created new objects for the home that helped define both the user and themselves as modern. New materials opened up fresh avenues for expression, including a focus on pure form, color, and surface. Ever-faster transportation inspired streamlined contours, even on immobile objects. Graphic designers also went for simplified, strongly linear expression and bold typefaces.