

# Modernism in Design

## Key Ideas

- Modern design (architectural, graphic, and industrial) reflects the political and socioeconomic tensions and cultural changes of our world from the late 19th century to the present.
- “The term Modernism commonly applies to 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.” (artsmia.org) The first half of the 20th century is marked by an explosion of modern design movements, often developing in tandem (e.g., Art Nouveau and Prairie School), as designers strove to break with the past.
- Many architects and designers aspired to “gesamtkunstwerk,” a complete artwork, designing a building with all the furnishings, lighting, and other interior elements.

## Terms and Names (see the handouts for each design movement)

Industrial design: A creative process—apart from the manufacturing process—that conceives of a product to be mass produced.

Modernism: (from artsmia.org): “The term Modernism commonly applies to 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” also is used to designate a separate design movement, with designers who have a rational or functional approach to design.

Postmodernism: (definition by Robert Venturi): “Elements which are hybrid rather than ‘pure’, compromising rather than ‘clear’, distorted rather than ‘straightforward’, ambiguous rather than ‘articulated’,... inconsistent and equivocal rather than direct and clear.”

## Modern Design

Works listed are in Mia’s collection, sorted by design period or style. **Disclaimer:** Mia’s collection of Modernist design is vast, so not all objects on display could be covered in the lecture or put on this list. The key ideas for each period, and hallmarks of a particular style, are noted separately for each design movement in the attached handout.

### Wiener Werkstätte (Vienna Secession)

- (Glasgow style, but exhibited at Wiener Werkstätte.) Charles Rennie Mackintosh, *Chair from the Argyle tea rooms*, 1898, commissioned by Catherine Cranston, 2005.44.
- Josef Maria Auentaller, Vienna Secession, 1900, P.98.33.16
- Josef Hoffmann; Manufacturer: Wiener Werkstätte (Vienna Workshops), *Egg cup and spoon*, 1904, 89.72.1,2
- Josef Hoffmann (1870–1956), *The Sitzmaschine*. Made by J & J Kohn. Austria, c.1908, 98.276.243
- Josef Hoffmann, *Table*, 1904, 91.60

### Prairie School

- William Gray Purcell and George Grant Elmslie, Edna S. Purcell house (Purcell-Cutts House), 1913.
- Frank Lloyd Wright, *Weed holder*, c. 1895-1900, 98.276.2

- Louis Sullivan, *Pair of elevator grilles, frieze, and overgrille*, c. 1893-1894, (from Chicago Stock Exchange Building) 92.2a-i
- Louis Sullivan, *Ornamental relief*, 1891-1892 (from Schiller Building theater), 98.256.4
- Frank Lloyd Wright, *Dining set*, 1904 (for George and Delta Barton House). Manufacturer: Matthews Brothers Furniture Company, 99.29.3a,b
- George Grant Elmslie, *Dining set*, 1910, (for Mrs. T.B. Keith home) 99.62.6
- Frank Lloyd Wright, *Hallway*, 1912-1914 (for Francis W. Little House), 72.11

### Constructivism

- Aleksandr Mikhailovich Rodchenko; Author, *Conversations with the Tax Collector about Poetry*, 1926.; Vladimir Vladimirovich Mayakovsky; Publisher: Zakkniga, 2000.130.3 (n.o.v.)

### De Stijl

- Gerrit Rietveld, *Red-Blue Chair*, c. 1974 (designed 1917-18), 98.276.42
- Gerrit Rietveld, *"Hogestoel" highback chair*, 1955 (designed 1919), 98.276.71
- Gerrit Rietveld, *"Berlin" chair*, c. 1974 (designed 1923), 98.276.43
- Gerrit Rietveld, *End table*, 1967 (original design 1923), 98.276.93
- Gerrit Rietveld, *Hanging light fixture*, 1976 (designed 1920), 98.276.67
- Gerrit Rietveld, *Zig-Zag chair*, 1939 (designed 1934), 98.276.44

### Deutscher Werkbund

- Peter Behrens (AEG products) *Teakettle*, 1909, 98.276.100a,b (n.o.v.)
- Peter Behrens, *Teakettle*, 1909, 98.276.41a,b

### Bauhaus

- T. Lux Feininger, *Bauhaus Band*, c. 1929, 98.276.12.7
- Marcel Breuer, *Nest of tables*, 1926-1930, 98.276.146.3
- Marcel Breuer, *"Wassily" armchair, model B3*, c. 1926, 2002.133.1
- Josef Hartwig; Manufacturer: Staatliches Bauhaus, *Chess set*, c. 1923, 98.276.19a-gg

### Art Deco

- Robert Bonfils, *Paris - 1925. Exposition Internationale des Arts Décoratifs et Industriels Modernes*, 1925, P.98.33.43
- Edgar Brandt, *Firescreen*, 1923, 98.276.20a-c
- Attributed to Abel Faigy, *Telephone stand*, c. 1927, 98.276.291.1a,b
- A.M. Cassandre, *Nord Express*, 1927, P.98.33.9
- Peter Müller-Munk, *Normandie pitcher*, c. 1935-37, 98.276.60
- Norman Bel Geddes, *Manhattan Cocktail Shaker*, 98.276.55.1a-c
- Paul Frankl, *Skyscraper furniture*, 1926-7, Chair, 98.276.57 and Bookcase, 2007.3a-d
- Joseph Claude Sinel, *"Model S" scale*, c. 1927, 2002.134
- Oscar Bach, *Pair of doors*, c. 1930, 71.51.1
- M. Desnet; Designer: René Nauny; Manufacturer: La Maison Desny, *Centerpiece coupé (bowl)*, c. 1927-1928;, 98.276.150

### Streamline (Streamline Art Moderne)

- Lester L. Wheeler, *"Aristocrat" stapling machine*, 1937, 2004.77
- J.A. Henckels Twin Works, *"Zeppelin" cocktail shaker (contains 18 serving elements)*, c. 1930, 98.276.119a-t
- Norman Bel Geddes, *"Soda King" syphon bottle*, c. 1935, 98.276.34 (n.o.v.)
- Unknown American, Manufacturer: Opco Company, *Ice gun*, 1935, 98.276.219.1

- Walter Dorwin Teague, *Nocturne radio*, c. 1937, 98.276.205
- Raymond Loewy, *Columaire Clock radio*, 1930, 98.276.204
- Henry Dreyfuss, *Thermos pitcher*, 1935, 98.276.225.1a,b (n.o.v.)
- Harold L. Van Doren, "*Skippy-Racer*" scooter, c. 1933, 2003.126
- Arthur Charles Radebaugh, *Bendix Products*, 1937, P.98.33.53
- R. Buckminster Fuller, "*Dymaxion*" Car, 1934, 98.276.319

### **International Style/Modernism**

- Mies van der Rohe, *Side chair*, 1932 (designed 1927), 88.12 (n.o.v.)
- Kenzo Tange, Mineapolis Institute of Art, 1974 additions

### **Organic Design (Organic Modernism)**

- Alvar Aalto, "*Paimio*" chair, c. 1932, 88.13
- Ralph Rapson, *Rocker*, 1945-1946, 2000.164

### **Scandinavian Design (a subset of Organic Design)**

- Arne Jacobsen, *Ant Chair*, 1952
- Nils Landberg, *Tulip glass (Tulpanglas)*, 1957, 98.276.277
- Seppo Koho, *Octo 4240 lamp*, 2005, 2014.53
- Kaj Franck, *Kremlin Bells double decanter*, 1960, 2015.22a-c
- Tanja Orsjoki, *Kelohonka*, 2008, 2012.42
- Harri Koskinen, *HK 002 lounge chair*, 2011, 2014.55

### **Postwar Design**

- Charles Eames; Designer: Ray Eames; Manufacturer: Evans Products Company, Molded Plywood Division, Venice, California, 1943-1949, *Leg splint*, 1943-1945, 96.81
- Harry Bertoia; Manufacturer: Knoll, *Diamond armchair*, c. 1952, 90.61.1
- Charles Eames; Designer: Ray Eames; Manufacturer: Herman Miller, Inc., *ESU (Eames Storage Unit) buffet*, c. 1950, 87.33.4
- Charles Eames; Designer: Ray Eames; Artist: Tigrett Enterprises, *Hang-It-All*, c. 1955 (designed 1953), 2011.100
- Charles Eames; Designer: Ray Eames; Manufacturer: Zenith Plastics, Gardena, California; Distributor: Herman Miller, Inc., "*DAR*" (*Dining Armchair Rod*) armchair, 1951 (designed c. 1948), 87.33.2.1
- Verner Panton, *Wire Cone chair*, c. 1958-1966, 98.276.327
- Piero Fornasetti, *Four-paneled folding screen*, c.1958, 2010.81

### **Postmodern Design (Memphis)**

- Peter Shire, *Menorah #2*, 1986, 2011.4 (n.o.v.)
- Michael Graves, *Target Wing*, 2006

### **Quotes:**

Charles Rennie Mackintosh: "Reason informed by emotion - expressed in beauty - elevated by earnestness - lightened by humour - that is the ideal that should guide all artists."

<http://www.houseforanartlover.co.uk/about/charles-rennie-mackintosh>

Frank Lloyd Wright: Early in life I had to choose between honest arrogance and hypocritical humility. I chose honest arrogance and have seen no occasion to change.

Marcel Breuer: "The Wassily was so new. People had jumped on it in exhibition to destroy it. They thought the whole world was going to end now with this furniture."

<http://www.theartstory.org/artist-breuer-marcel.htm>

Raymond Loewy: "Between two products equal in price, function and quality, the one with the most attractive exterior will win."

<http://www.raymondloewy.com/about.html#6>

Michael Graves: Good design should be accessible to all.

<https://spinalpedia.com/blog/2015/03/sci-superstar-michael-graves/>

## **Resources:**

For information on our collection of Prairie School objects, access the dedicated website, Unified Vision: The Architecture and Design of the Prairie School:

<http://artsmia.org/unified-vision/introduction/>

This link brings you to an online resource for the modernism design collection at Mia:

<http://archive.artsmia.org/modernism>

Wonderful interactive MOMA site, on Russian avant-garde (Constructivism) in books:

<https://www.moma.org/interactives/exhibitions/2002/russian/main.html>

Good synopsis of the Bauhaus and a list of the designers and artists linked to the school:

<http://www.theartstory.org/movement-bauhaus.htm>

Here's a link to the UNESCO site, with the video of the Rietveld Schröder House:

<http://whc.unesco.org/en/list/965/video>

More about graphic design... If you'd like to know more about modernism in graphic design, check out the documentary Helvetica (yes, a documentary about a typeface!). The trailer is here:

<https://vimeo.com/73809723>

More about the eradication of ornament in modern design: The Long(ish) Read: "Ornament and Crime" by Adolf Loos <http://www.archdaily.com/798529/the-longish-read-ornament-and-crime-adolf-loos>

To learn more about beginnings of Organic Design in the United States, check out the online catalog online for the 1941 Organic Design in Home Furnishings exhibition at MOMA (scroll down to click on the catalog):

<https://www.moma.org/calendar/exhibitions/1803?locale=en>

Early interview with Frank Lloyd Wright, discussing Louis Sullivan's influence and Wright's definition of organic: <https://diva.sfsu.edu/collections/sfbatv/bundles/191389>

Frankfurt kitchen artstories: <https://artstories.artsmia.org/#/o/95937>