

Kirkland Museum of Fine & Decorative Art Gallery Guides

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What is the “Architect” tag on the object labels?



This blue “a” signifies that the designer of the work was also an architect.

Did you know that many designers were trained as architects? Some architects designed furnishings for their buildings in order to create one unified look. In German this is called ***Gesamtkunstwerk***, a total work of art.

Currently more than 650 objects by 100 architects are on view.

In total, Kirkland Museum has the design work of over 125 architects in the collection. The architects come from 25 different countries and span all of the design periods represented in the Museum, from Arts & Crafts to Modern and Postmodern.

Vance Kirkland

(1904 – 1981)

The Museum's namesake is among the most important Colorado and regional painters of the 20th century. Kirkland created all the paintings in this gallery, as well as in his studio & art school building at the north end of the Museum.

Kirkland was born in Convoy, Ohio, graduated from the Cleveland School of Art and moved to Denver in 1929 as the Founding Director of the present School of Art at the University of Denver. He also founded the Kirkland School of Art, as well as the Art Program (now the Department of Visual Arts) at the University of Colorado Denver (UCD). He painted and resided in Denver for the rest of his life.

Kirkland's work can be divided into five major periods (with over 30 series):

- **Designed Realism**
- **Surrealism**
- **Hard Edge Abstraction / Abstractions from Nature**
- **Abstract Expressionism**
- **The Dot Paintings**

Kirkland painted primarily in watercolor for the first half of his career, and oil paint for the second. His career began in the mid-1920s with realist watercolor paintings of Rocky Mountain landscapes, which evolved into surrealist deadwood worlds. As he moved into abstraction, Kirkland developed three unique textures, initially mixing watercolor and denatured alcohol together, then subsequently mixing oil paint and water together to create another signature technique. His third texture derived from placing thousands of dots, (mostly) on top of the oil paint and water mixtures, for his final vibrant period of Dot Paintings. In addition to his 55-year career as an innovative and successful painter, Kirkland was a remarkable educator and collector.

To create abstract paintings with his unique oil paint and water mixtures and later dots, Kirkland had to place the canvases flat on his worktable. Since he then could not reach the center of the larger paintings (he was about 5' 2 ½"), nor could he bend over a painting for 10 hours a day, he would lie across straps that were strung from the ceiling, about 1 ½ feet above the painting. [See a mock-up of the straps in his workroom in the studio building.]

SYNESTHESIA

Perhaps the strangest aspect about Kirkland's paintings is that many of his color combinations are derived from classical music. Kirkland was synesthetic meaning, as he applied it, that he could hear color. While he could sense color when he listened to most music, only certain classical compositions with moderate but not extreme dissonance would provide Kirkland with a desired alloy of colors. In 1978, Kirkland responded in an interview: "I have always interpreted sound as color. Mahler, Schoenberg, Bartok, Berg, Shostakovich, Prokofiev and Ives all explored new tonalities that aided me in transposing sounds into colors."

DOCUMENTARIES

There have been three one-hour television documentaries about Kirkland for PBS stations. *Vance Kirkland's Visual Language* [1994], included directors and curators from six American museums. *The Artist and The Muse* is a ballet based on Kirkland's life, with the scenario written, and music—loved by Kirkland—chosen by Hugh Grant. It was choreographed and danced by Colorado Ballet and won the Heartland Emmy Award for Best Entertainment Program of 2000. *MuseumMuseum, West of the Mississippi: Kirkland Museum of Fine & Decorative Art*; explores the collections of Kirkland Museum [2003].

EUROPEAN TOUR

Kirkland's works received an international traveling exhibition from April 24, 1997 through February 25, 2000. Selections of Kirkland's paintings and drawings traveled to 13 institutions (11 museums and 2 exhibition halls) in 10 European countries. All 5 of Kirkland's painting periods were represented in all 13 exhibitions, demonstrating the strength of his entire career. 11 of the 13 exhibitions were accompanied by a published catalog or book.



1925, age 21
Vance Kirkland
paints on an easel
at Burt Lake,
Northern Michigan.



c. 1940, about age 35
Kirkland painting a
smaller work in front of
his large drawing for the
mural *Oklahoma Land
Rush, Opening of the
Cheyenne and Arapahoe
Country*, 1940, designed
for the post office in
Sayre, Oklahoma as a
commission from the U.S.
Treasury Department's
Section of Painting and
Sculpture.



c. 1942, about age 37
Kirkland in front of his
painting *Mountain Picnic*.



c. 1942, about age 37
Kirkland and his wife
Anne (1893–1970) by the
pool in their backyard at
8th and Pearl Street in
Denver. Vance and Anne
Kirkland married in 1941.

Late 1940s,
about age 45
Kirkland with
students, most
likely at the
University of
Denver.



1957, age 52
Kirkland in his studio building at
13th and Pearl Street in Denver
with his paintings *Mysteries in
Orange Space*, 1954 (top) and
Memorie di Villa Adriano, 1955.



1961, age 56
Kirkland poses in
front of his 1961
painting *Memory of
Ajanta (India)*.

1979, age 74
Kirkland in his
studio working on
*Explosions on a
Sun 100 Billion
Light Years from
Earth*. Photo by
Hugh Grant.



1980, age 75 Kirkland posing in his
studio building in front of his 1959
painting *Nebula Near Jupiter*.
Photo by Glenn Cuerden.



1981, age 76 Kirkland in his studio painting what became his last
finished work, *Forces of Energy from a Sun in the Open Star Cluster K 1*
(displayed on this wall at left). This photo by Hugh Grant is among the
last photos of Kirkland, taken a month before he died on May 24, 1981.

Gallery 3 Features

International decorative art:

 **Arts & Crafts**

 **Aesthetic Movement**

Colorado & regional fine art:

 **Realism**

Find each style listed above on gallery wall where style or movement begins.

Each style or movement continues around the rest of the room until there is another sign.



International 1860–c. 1918; American 1876–early 1920s

Arts & Crafts can be seen as the first modernistic design style to break with Victorian and other fashionable styles of the time, beginning in the 1860s in England and specifically dating to the Red House of 1860 of William Morris (1834–1896). Arts & Crafts is a philosophy as much as a design style or movement, stemming from its application by William Morris and others who were influenced by the writings of John Ruskin and A.W.N. Pugin. In a reaction against the mass production of cheap, badly designed machine-made goods, and the demeaning treatment of workers, Morris and others championed hand-made craftsmanship with quality materials done in supportive communes—which were seen as a revival of the medieval guilds and a return to artisan workshops. Designs are characterized by their simplicity and functionality, generally without unnecessary curves and ornament. The way objects were constructed was not hidden, and exposed wood grain was considered beautiful. This was called “honest construction”.

Americans got their first exposure to Arts & Crafts at the Centennial Exposition in Philadelphia in 1876. In the 1880s, Charles, Albert and Gustav Stickley established Stickley Brothers in Binghamton, NY. Gustav subsequently published his influential magazine, *The Craftsman* (1901–1916). Arts & Crafts in America then became known as “Craftsman Style” or “Mission Style”, from the California missions that exemplified simplicity of construction.



Aesthetic Movement

about 1865–1900

The Aesthetic Movement, which began in England, was a reaction against Victorian decoration. Unlike proponents of the Arts & Crafts Movement, members of the Aesthetic Movement believed that art did not have to convey moral messages. They focused instead on the idea of a cult of beauty and believed art should provide refined pleasure. Life, they asserted, should emulate art. The most pervasive (though not the only) stylistic influence on Aestheticism was *Japonisme*, a fascination with the artistic motifs of Japan. Pots were made in traditional Western shapes but were decorated with Japanese blossoms, pine branches, birds and other natural forms. The understated and simplified decoration was a contrast to the profusely decorated Victorian furnishings and anticipated modernism.



The first non-native artists to visit Colorado came with government expeditions. Charged with recording the new landscapes, these artists documented what they saw in the realist style then popular in the cultural capitals of the eastern United States. They helped to promote the beauty and promise of the West by sketching the fauna and flora of the region and later turning their drawings into dramatic paintings with views of the Rocky Mountains. It was the 1858 Pikes Peak Gold Rush and discovery of gold along Cherry Creek which first brought many new people to Colorado, including artists who settled in the state. The realist works they created form the core of Western American Art and are the foundation of Kirkland Museum's timeline of the art history of Colorado and our region.

~ Some paintings in this gallery could be considered part realistic and part impressionistic. ~

Gallery 4 Features

International decorative art:



Art Nouveau



Glasgow Style



Wiener Werkstätte

Colorado & regional fine art:



Impressionism

Find each style listed above on gallery wall where style or movement begins.

Each style or movement continues around the rest of the room until there is another sign.

The logo consists of two overlapping orange circles. The left circle contains a white stylized chair or stool icon. The right circle contains the text 'DEC ART' in white, stacked vertically.

Art Nouveau

International 1880s–c. 1918; American 1890s–c. 1918

This movement/style originated virtually simultaneously in France, Belgium and England. Siegfried Bing gave the style its name when he opened a shop and gallery in Paris in December 1895 called *Maison de L'Art Nouveau* (House of New Art). He soon expanded his gallery with workshops and was responsible for significantly exposing the “new art”. Prior to that time, the movement in France was called *Le Style Moderne* (the Modern Style). It soon spread to many other countries and was variously called: in German speaking countries *Jugendstil* (Youth Style) and specifically in Austria *Sezessionstil* (Secession style); in Italy *Stile Liberty* (Liberty Style from London's Liberty & Co.) or *Stile Floreale* (Floral Style) and in Spain *Modernisme*. Art Nouveau is distinguished by its graceful, curving designs mostly emulating botanic forms, but sometimes bird, animal and human female forms. Examples are whiplash handles, playful serpentine grills and arching buttresses. Art Nouveau is more restrained in its curves and amount of decoration than Victorian design. The sinuous references to plants, tendrils, flowers and other natural forms are stylized rather than being realistic.



Glasgow Style

1896–1914

The Glasgow School was a circle of influential modern artists and designers who began to coalesce in Glasgow, Scotland in the 1870s and flourished from the 1890s to sometime around 1910. Glasgow experienced an economic boom at the end of the 19th century resulting in a burst of distinctive contributions to the Arts & Crafts and Art Nouveau movements. Glasgow Style (a blend of Celtic and Japanese art) significantly inspired other movements and groups such as the Wiener Werkstätte, Bauhaus, Vienna Secession and Deutscher Werkbund. Among the most prominent figures of the Glasgow School's loose collective were acclaimed architect and designer Charles Rennie Mackintosh, the painter and glass artist Margaret MacDonald (Mackintosh's wife), MacDonald's sister Frances, and J. Herbert MacNair—who together were known as “The Four” and notably gave a celebrated display as part of the 8th Wiener Sezession exhibition in 1900 in Vienna. By the time the Mackintoshes left Glasgow in 1914, the group was also dispersing and getting fewer commissions. Their early modernism was too severe for most patrons, and their sinuous elongated figures, which had a great influence on painter Gustav Klimt, had been labeled the “Ghoul School” or the “Spook School”.



Wiener Werkstätte

(Viennese Workshops), 1903–1932

Another style and association of artists developed at almost the same time as Arts & Crafts and Art Nouveau, but had its own distinct character. The Wiener Werkstätte was founded by architect Josef Hoffmann and painter and designer Koloman Moser with the aim of promoting Austrian and particularly Viennese artworks. The works of Charles Mackintosh, Charles Ashbee and E. W. Godwin influenced the Wiener Werkstätte, and in particular Mackintosh influenced Hoffmann. In line with Arts & Crafts principles, the artists also strove to achieve total works of art or a *Gesamtkunstwerk* with their various disciplines. Visually, the style is often characterized by restrained geometric curves, square corners and duplicated linear patterns. Ornamentation tends to be repetitive, such as the curling lines or squares in a Gustav Klimt painting. Decoration is generally restrained and sometimes there is none. In addition to architectural projects, the designers created metalware, glassware, tableware, furniture, flatware, ceramics, textiles, fashion design, theater costumes, jewelry and graphics (lettering, posters, wallpapers, bookbinding, box designs and coverings and postcards). The Wiener Werkstätte disbanded because of financial instability due to the severe economic conditions in the world following the stock market crash of October 1929 in the United States.



Impressionism

Impressionism started in Paris, France in the 1870s and is characterized by a sketch-like, atmospheric quality of painting. Impressionists such as Claude Monet were interested in capturing the impression of a single fleeting moment with emphasis on the quality of light, releasing the need for the careful details expected in the academic, realist paintings of their time. Brushstrokes are often clearly visible and expressive. Many impressionist works were created out-of-doors with pure, unblended colors using the newly-invented tubed paint. Colorado artists adapted this style to their work as modernism was introduced to Colorado.

~ Some paintings in this gallery could be considered part realistic and part impressionistic. ~

Gallery 5 Features

International decorative art:

 **Bauhaus**

 **De Stijl**

 **International Style**

Colorado & regional fine art:

 **Regionalism**

Find each style listed above on gallery wall where style or movement begins.

Each style or movement continues around the rest of the room until there is another sign.



1919–1933

The Bauhaus was a renowned art school, whose immense influence continues today. It was founded in April 1919 by German architect Walter Gropius in Weimar, Germany, when times were very difficult directly after World War I. It relocated to Dessau from 1925 to 1932, then moved to Berlin briefly until the Nazis closed it in April 1933. One of the most important philosophies of the Bauhaus was that of unity of the arts through craftsmanship or *Gesamtkunstwerk* (total work of art). Geometric forms were the basis of most objects, sculptures, paintings and buildings. Primary colors, grey, black and natural metal patinas were widely used. Function was more important than decoration, leading to clean lines and simplicity of shapes.



(The Style), 1917–1931

This association of artists and architects and a monthly magazine (also called *De Stijl* and published 1917–1931) were founded in 1917 in the Netherlands by painter, writer and architect Theo van Doesburg. *De Stijl* translates as “the style”. *De Stijl* artists/designers embraced cubist ideals, pure abstraction, primary colors, horizontal and vertical lines, rectangular shapes and use of black, white and gray to express their universal values and absolute harmony. *De Stijl* designers had a dematerialist approach to design and, along with the Bauhaus, which was greatly influenced by *De Stijl*, were integral to the development of the later Modern Movement. Painter Piet Mondrian and architect/designer Gerrit Rietveld are the best-known proponents of *De Stijl*. The death of van Doesburg brought the movement to an end.



International Style

1920s–1960s

Although “International Style” applies to architecture, some of its proponents, such as Eileen Gray, Pierre Jeanneret and Charlotte Perriand, designed decorative art and these objects could be considered also to represent International Style. The hallmarks of International Style architecture are simplistic, modernistic designs, generally with buildings of reinforced concrete, glass and steel. The term gained wide use when Alfred Barr, Director of the Museum of Modern Art, New York, gave the exhibition in 1932 titled *Modern Architecture—International Exhibition*, co-organized by Philip Johnson and Henry-Russell Hitchcock, with a companion book entitled *International Style: Architecture Since 1922*.



Regionalism

Regionalism, also known as American Scene Painting, portrayed American subjects with an entirely American approach (mid 1920s– mid 1940s). Famous examples are paintings by Thomas Hart Benton, Grant Wood and others, although Regionalism was not limited to the mid-west. Vintage regionalist paintings are stylized to the extent that they are not Realism or Impressionism, but they are still representational and not abstract. Since the term Regionalism can apply to any artwork done to portray a particular region at any time, vintage regional paintings can be referred to as Modernist Regionalism, which is a more descriptive term than Regionalism. These paintings represent an early style of modernism and they are not “realistic Regionalism” or “impressionistic Regionalism”. Starting in the 1940s, Regionalism was increasingly displaced by abstract art and, to a lesser extent, Surrealism.

Gallery 6 Features

International decorative art:



Colorado & regional fine art:



Find each style listed above on gallery wall where style or movement begins.

Each style or movement continues around the rest of the room until there is another sign.



International c. 1920–c. 1940; American mid 1920s–early 1940s

The hallmarks of Art Deco are sleek, jazzy, streamlined designs that often connote speed. Typical elements are sweeping, tapering curves, contoured shapes and reinforcing outlines that suggest forward motion. Repetitive geometric patterns; stepped forms; angular, zigzag motifs; stylized nude or clothed figures—generally female—in elegant poses or graceful, dance-like positions; sleek depictions of animals such as hounds, deer and jungle or domestic cats and gazelles; frequently bright colors and usually with black or silver or gold; use of chrome or aluminum; beautiful exotic woods—all are indicative of Art Deco designs. The term derives from *l'Exposition Internationale des Arts Décoratifs et Industriels Modernes* (International Exposition of Modern Industrial and Decorative Arts), a celebrated world fair held in Paris in 1925. The Art Deco Movement flourished in the 1920s and 1930s as designers moved away from the organic forms of Art Nouveau.



Surrealism

Surrealism began in France and grew out of the atrocities of World War I. It spread through Europe, then to America, resulting in the 1936 exhibition *Fantastic Art, Dada, Surrealism* given at New York's Museum of Modern Art. Surrealism portrays real, actual things and scenes, but then distorts, alters or eerily transforms the images, or puts things together in unnatural ways so that scenes become surreal. The surrealists felt that what appears to be real isn't; how people portray themselves is often not representative of their true nature; reality lies in our subconscious. Surrealist images are therefore like dreams or frequently like nightmares, or sometimes whimsical and humorous.



Referential Abstraction

Referential Abstraction denotes art that abstracts something but the viewer can still tell what it is; the abstraction refers to something. Abstraction is the process of removing unwanted or unnecessary information and reducing something to its essential characteristics. In art, this often includes representational, or realistic, detail. Referential Abstraction denotes art that has undergone some of this reduction yet still retains some representational context; the work refers to something concrete and visible to the viewer.

Gallery 7 Features

International decorative art:

 **Modern American**

 **Modern Italian**

 **Modern Scandinavian**

Colorado & regional fine art:

 **Referential Abstraction**

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This gallery features vignettes of Modern design from three different geographical areas, for the sake of comparison:

 **Modern American**

 **Modern Italian**

 **Modern Scandinavian**

In general, Modern is:

 **Modern**

c. 1931–c. 1970

The key to recognizing Modern design is its rounded, organic, biomorphic, natural shapes. Modern came in gradually, as Art Deco was running its course. The *Paimio Lounge Chair* by Alvar Aalto (1930–1931) dates the beginning of Modern design as the first chair widely known to curve to the human body. Other landmarks of Modern design are the *Egg Chair* by Arne Jacobsen (1957–1958), the *Marshmallow Sofa* by Irving Harper of George Nelson Associates (1956), *American Modern* tableware by Russel Wright (1937–1938), the Studebaker car by Raymond Loewy (1950), the TWA terminal at JFK airport by Eero Saarinen (1956–1962), the *Potato Chip Chair* by Charles and Ray Eames (1945), the *Panton* plastic stacking chair by Verner Panton (the first functional one-piece plastic [polyurethane] chair, designed 1960, produced 1968), *Compact* (later Hellerware) plastic stacking tableware by Massimo Vignelli (1964) and later additional designs by Massimo and his wife, Lella.



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Gallery 8 Features

International decorative art:

 **Postmodern**

 **Modern**

Colorado & regional fine art:

 **Pure Abstraction**

Find each style listed above on gallery wall where style or movement begins.

Each style or movement continues around the rest of the room until there is another sign.



Postmodern

and beyond, c. 1970–present

Postmodern design (c.1970–c.1990) is noted for its unusual use of materials, such as the cardboard *Easy Edges* chairs (1969–1973) by American architect Frank Gehry or the combination of plastic and metal for several of Michael Graves's designs of teapots and other items for Target stores. An important Postmodern style developed with the Memphis-Milano Movement active from 1981 to 1987, led by Ettore Sottsass and including Michele De Lucchi, Shiro Kuramata and others. It was an Italian design and architecture group based in Milan, Italy, whose products included furniture, ceramics, glassware, metalware and textiles.

With new design happening now, no one—except perhaps today's designers—can say what's next.



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Pure Abstraction

Pure Abstraction, also called non-objective or non-representational art, does not seek to depict identifiable things. The subject of the work is the content the viewer sees: feelings and/or movement and/or optical effects are created using line, form, color, texture and other elements or even the process itself.