

HUMANITIES INSTITUTE

NORTH AMERICAN VISUAL ARTS

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PAINTING

Overview From the beginning, North American art has been characterized by a combination of practicality, creative self-expression, and a desire to use art to embody the values and beliefs of their culture and society. Identity has been at the heart of the art of America, as well as the idea that painting is one of the most important ways to capture a world view and to allow the viewer to see through the artist's own eyes and thus communicate in a way that transcends words. While 20th-century art was perhaps most overt in its insistence that art transmits philosophical and cultural ideas, that notion can be found in North American painting in all time frames.

ANCIENT PERIOD

PreHistory

Clovis culture (18,000 – 8,000 BC): The Clovis cultures did not paint, but they were prodigious tool-makers, and fashioned spear points, blades, drills, needles, and scrapers, which they used in foraging for plants, hunting small animals, and fishing. They carved lines and shapes into the walls of caves (petroglyphs), but very little has been found as yet.

Classical

Southwest Pueblo (1200 BCE – 1300 AC): The Pueblo Indians painted their dwellings and also used sand paintings in their ceremonies. Hohokam rock art can be found in the valleys in southern and south-central Arizona, which they turned into an agricultural center by means of irrigation canals. The rock art of the Hohokam included both petroglyphs (designs chipped away on the rock) and pictographs (designs painted on the rock). The designs include abstract art (circles, crosses, spirals, and meandering lines) and also representational art, with birds, snakes, mammals, and humans. It is believed that the art was created in conjunction with ceremonies.

Eastern Woodlands (1000 BCE – 1000 AD): The Algonquin, Mohawk, Seneca, Abenaki and others of the Northeast decorated their clothing and their wampum belts (belts made of beads shaped from shells). The Eastern Algonquian peoples of Canada and the northern U.S. painted flowers, abstract designs, and figures of people on their belts and clothing.

Mississippian (800 – 1500 AD): The Mound dwellers of the Mississippian painted the inner rooms of their dwellings, and also the walls of caves. Very little is known about these architects of the Mississippi River Valley because by the time that the Europeans visited their lands, there was little left except their abandoned structures. Their pottery was painted, generally with geometric shapes, but also in the shape of animals.

Colonial (Early Modern)

Colonial: Portraiture influenced by Dutch and Flemish. Example: John Singleton Copley, *Paul Revere* (c. 1768-70). Landscape and tableaux of important historical events: Benjamin West, *The Treaty of Penn with the Indians*, 1771-72.

Revolutionary War Period: War scenes and heroic portraiture. Lighting used to indicate heroic actions and the moment of sacrifice. John Trumbull, *The Death of General Montgomery in the Attack on Quebec*, 1775.

Federal Period: Nation-building portraiture, following the techniques of European artists who painted the aristocracy and heroes. Edward Savage, *The Washington Family*, 1789. Scenes of ordinary life (influenced by Dutch and Flemish painters). Gilbert Stuart, *The Skater*, 1782.

Nineteenth Century

Early Republic: Portraiture and scenes of early life. Rembrandt Peale, *Rubens Peale with a Geranium*, 1801. Myth-making and heroic visual narratives. Thomas Sully, *Passage of the Delaware*, 1819.

Antebellum Era: Exploration of American ways of life. George Caleb Bingham, *Fur Traders Descending the Missouri*, 1845. George Catlin, *An Indian Ball-Play*, 1846 – 1850. Colors are vivid and there is a focus on ethnographic authenticity.

Hudson River School: Albert Bierstadt, *The Rocky Mountains, Lander's Peak*, 1863. Thomas Cole, *Gelyna (View near Ticonderoga)*, 1826-1828. Frederic Edwin Church, Thomas Doughty, an Edenic vision of nature, with dramatic use of light and color, with a sense of divine illumination.

American Barbizon School: Most of the painters in this school were trained in Europe and influenced by the French Barbizon School artists such as Jean-Francois Millet, and then later by the impressionists. Mary Cassatt was influenced by European Impressionists while Childe Hassam's landscapes and depictions of wildflowers create a sense of motion and sunlight. Examples include Childe Hassam's *Celia Thaxter's Garden* (1890) and Horatio Walker's *Watching the Turkeys*. Other artists include Winslow Homer, William Morris Hunt, George Inness.

Photography: In the last half of the nineteenth century, technical improvements made it possible to take photographs of historical situations, landscapes, and portraits. Mathew B. Brady documented the Civil War and is known as the father of photojournalism. Ansel Easton Adams photographed the American West, and George Grantham Bain was known for his photography of the Mexican Revolution, celebrities, parades, and more.

Portraits: James McNeill Whistler – portraiture; John Singer Sargent – contrasts of colors, light and shadow, brush strokes and texture demonstrate Impressionist influence, and informal poses capture a sense of spontaneity. Some of the painters were untrained such as Ammi Phillips, while others trained in the European tradition, which include Thomas Sully, G. P. A. Healy. The work of Thomas Eakins evokes images from everyday life, and an emphasis on texture. Henry Ossawa Tanner was the first African-American acclaimed portrait painter.

Realism: Raphael Peale was well-known for his realistic still-life and trompe-l'oeil. Examples include *Cheese with three crackers* (1813), *Melons and Morning Glories* (1813), and *Venus Rising from the Sea – A Deception* (1822).

Twentieth Century

American Impressionism: Beginning in the 19th century, and continuing into the 20th century, American Impressionists were known for their bright palettes and energetic brush strokes. Artists include Childe Hassam and Mary Cassatt.

Ashcan School: Realism returned with the "Ashcan School" which focused on social change through art and literature by painting scenes of everyday life in middle and working class settings. Examples include George Bellows, Everett Shinn, and George Benjamin Luks.

Harlem Renaissance: The 1920s and 30s Harlem Renaissance was a literary and artistic movement which brought together music, poetry, prose, and painting. The techniques were influenced by music, and known for their bright colors and cultural elements. Examples include Romare Bearden, Palmer Hayden, and Jacob Lawrence.

Socialist Realism / New Deal art: Thomas Hart Benton is perhaps the best-known of the artists commissioned by the Federal Art Project of the Works Progress Administration (WPA) established during the Great Depression.

Influenced by the Mexican muralists such as Diego Rivera, the artists brought together myth and populist movements. Examples include Grant Wood, Reginald Marsh, and Thomas Hart Benton.

Abstract Expressionism: After World War II, artists in New York took the minimalism and modernist painting many steps further than the famous New York Armory Show of 1911, where Cubism and other abstract works were shown. Abstract Expressionism was characterized by experimental paint application and dramatic brush strokes. Examples include Jackson Pollock, Willem de Kooning, Mark Rothko, Arshile Gorky, Robert Motherwell, and Alexander Calder.

Color Field: Color Field painting focused on large canvases with paint applied in unique ways, including dripped from a stick or poured directly from the can. Adolph Gottlieb and Mark Rothko were the first, and in the 1960s, color field painting continued with Morris Louis, Kenneth Noland and Helen Frankenthaler.

Mixed Media Pop Art: Robert Rauschenberg, Jasper Johns, Andy Warhol and Roy Lichtenstein incorporated everyday objects of popular culture and also blended photos, newsprint, comic strips and discarded objects. Their goal was often satiric commentary on American life, and in particular, consumerism.

Discussion/Questions

1. The earliest inhabitants of North America created artifacts that were highly utilitarian such as finely crafted awls, blades, and spearpoints, and they used their tools to carve glyphs in the walls of caves and on rocks. When we consider that their religion was shamanistic, and it often involved assuming the attributes of an animal. Given the convergence of art and religious beliefs, what are some of the possible ways that art was used in the early civilizations before the arrival of the Spaniards, English, Dutch, and French?
2. Art in colonial America was very much influenced by European traditions. And yet, it was clear that the artists in America were eager to differentiate themselves from their European counterparts. To begin, the subject matter was often different, as were the landscapes and scenery. What were some of the ways in which art in Colonial America was different than art in Europe?
3. In the 19th century, American artists truly embraced the notion of American identity, American exceptionalism, and utopian visions. They did so not only with their landscapes but also with portraiture and still life. Please describe 5 or more works that exemplify how artists sought to use painting to depict America as a unique place with its own identity.
4. The 20th century began with a break from the values, hierarchies, and techniques of the past, and in regular succession, sought to break with its immediate forebears, even if they were only a decade or so in use. Describe the early 20th century artworks in America and explain how they represented a break from the past and a commentary on America. Then, follow up and create a timeline in the 20th century that links art movement with an underlying philosophical or aesthetic idea or ideal.

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SCULPTURE

Overview Sculpture has been used in the United States to commemorate, monumentalize, and to create cultural and social commentary and critique. While the earlier periods of sculpture in North America often had to do with commemorating life, death, and religious ceremony, the art of the new “American experiment” had much to do with legitimizing a culture (through echoes of Europe) and by emphasizing its importance by creating monuments to people, events, and concepts. Later, sculpture’s role became that of the communication of transformational concepts, such as how the intersection of man and machine could lead to a better world, or how changing the subject of art (instead of presidents and the rich, it became the oppressed and marginalized) could bolster human dignity and effect social justice.

ANCIENT PERIOD

PreHistory

Clovis culture (18,000 – 8,000 BC): The Clovis were not known for sculpture, except for small carvings and rock art, carved into the sides of cliffs and in caves.

Classical

Desert Southwest: The Native Americans did not create large sculptures of wood, rock, metal or clay. However, they did create massive earthworks that bring to mind that of the Nazca Lines in Peru. There are similar gigantic human and animal figures drawn on the ground’s surface (geoglyphs and “intaglio”) in the arid parts of California near Blythe. Thanks to low rainfall, the lines have been preserved and are estimated to be as old as 100 BC. The geoglyphs were created by scraping away the surface layers of dark rocks to reveal the lighter clays below. The clays were compacted to reduce the possibility of invasion by plants. The geoglyphs depict human figures, animals (deer), birds, snakes, and mountain lions.

Eastern Woodlands: On a plateau near Ohio Creek in Adams County, Ohio, there is a 1,348 foot-long continuous effigy mound, which rises up 3 feet from the ground. From above, it gives the appearance of a snake, hence the name, “Serpent Mound.” However, to one not so animal-centric, it appears to be a series of sine waves, beginning (or terminating) with a spiral, and then terminating (or beginning) with a circle. Mathematically, it is more coherent in terms of explanation, than that of a shaman-tinged narrative of a snake with a curled tail. Recent dating has put its age at around 250 BC. No one really knows its purpose. It was clearly meant to be seen from above, which reinforces the notion that early civilizations had the ability to travel above the surface of the earth.

Colonial (Early Modern)

Folk art -- gravestones / tombstone, mainly in the New England. Examples – skull with wings carved on marble tombstone. The main themes and motifs included a skull flanked by wings and also depictions of Heaven (trees, leaves, fountains). They were characterized as being low-relief and utilitarian.

Wood carvings: Mainly religious, used in Spanish colonial from churches and missions. Example: Nuestra Senora de losdolores ... painted wood carvings of the Virgin Mary, Christ on the Cross, Three Wise Men, nativities, also the Saints.

Italian influence: Several American sculptors working in colonial times and in the early years of the new republic were deeply influenced by the Classical and Neo-Classical sculpture they saw in Italy. The themes and techniques were applied to statuary and building motifs, especially those used for government purposes, to contribute to the architecture that embodied the values. Sculptors included Hiram Powers, Horatio Greenough, and Thomas Crawford.

Nineteenth Century

Italian Period: The influence of Classical and Neo-Classical sculpture continued in the first part of the 19th Century, as state and federal governments sought to communicate the values and vision of what was considered a

grand, new experiment through concrete, visual form. Many of the pieces were an integral part of buildings associated with the government. Additional sculptors included Randolph Rogers and Chauncey Ives.

American women sculptors: Despite the deep anxiety generated by educated women, and also women artists, there were many women sculptures working in America during the 19th century. Most worked during the Italian period, and they produced works that are now icons of American identity, including Vinnie Ream's famous sculpture of Abraham Lincoln. Sculptors included Harriet Hosmer, Vinnie Reams, Anne Whitney, Edmonia Lewis, and Emma Stebbins. Of this group, Edmonia Lewis deserves special note. Edmonia was African-American, born in Greenbush (now Rensselaer, near Albany), of an Ojibwe-African-American mother and an Afro-Haitian father. Both parents died before Edmonia was 10 years of age, and so Edmonia lived with her Ojibwe relatives near Niagara Falls, going by the name, Wildfire. Edmonia had the good fortune to have access to education, and when she was 15, she enrolled in Oberlin College, where she changed her name to Mary Edmonia Lewis, and studied art. Perhaps her most popular work is a white marble sculpture she completed in 1867 entitled *Forever Free*, which depicts a man with broken shackles on his wrists, and a woman kneeling, face uplifted in prayer and gratitude. Not surprisingly, Edmonia had a very interesting and challenging life; the biographical details cause one to stop, pause, and reflect on society, art, and human dignity.

Paris Years: The last half of the nineteenth century signified a dramatic shift in influence. Instead of the NeoClassical models that were admired by sculptors of the Italian period, the emphasis was on naturalism and the dramatic style epitomized by Parisian sculptors such as Rodin and Carpeaux. The American sculptors found deep and lasting success, not only for sculpting monuments to engender reverence for American leaders and institutions, but also for their engravings which appeared on coins. Examples include Augustus Saint-Gaudens (Adams Memorial, plus \$20 gold coin), Frederick MacMonnies (Princeton Battle Monument), Daniel Chester French (Lincoln in a chair – Lincoln Memorial), and Jose De Creff.

America trained / outsider: Americans began to train themselves and to embrace a naturalistic style which captured the values of American expansionism and the frontier. Examples include Frederic Remington (super-energized cowboys and horses in action), Solon Borglum, and Cyrus Dallin ("Appeal to the Great Spirit" has become an icon of the West. These were highly romantic and romanticized sculptures, and they were often smaller in size and cast in bronze. Frederic Remington's work was popular in that it depicted the Western frontier with almost journalistic attention to capturing the "meaningful moment" and the historical context and values.

Wildlife sculptors (Animaliers): The idea of American West, and the idea of finding and capturing profound truths about the essence of existence was highly appealing to painters, photographers, and sculptors. The sculptors often depicted animals in the throes of a life-or-death struggle, or in poses that related symbolically to an identity narrative of the Americans who were exploring and developing the Great Plains, Rocky Mountains, Sierras, and the deserts, salt lakes, and other unexpected natural beauties. The artists included Antoine Barye, Charles Russell, LabertLaessle, and Edward Kemeys. In Canada, beavers and moose were often juxtaposed with lions to signify the incorporation of British rule while asserting Canadian identity.

Public monuments and Carving mountains: The idea of the grand spectacle, and the sculpture that would communicate a compelling message "writ large" was not just interesting, but financially underwritten, by those who supported an expanding, expansionist America, not just geographically, but also economically. The underpinning driver was innovation, which translated into two different phases of Industrial Revolution, along with the discovery and exploitation of natural resources. Mount Rushmore by GutzonBorglum is the most well-known. Others include Stone Mountain (Georgia) and the Crazy Horse Memorial

Twentieth Century

Modern Classicism: Greek sculptural ideas and styles were revived in the early 20th century with Art Deco, which embraced the combination of stylized Greek gods and the development of a style that paid homage to technology, sleek lines, and technocracy. Paul Manship, Paul Jennewein, and Edward McCartan are examples.

African-American sculptors: The Harlem Renaissance provided an opportunity for young African-American sculptors to find a receptive audience and supportive patrons. The sculptures often depicted scenes or personages from everyday life. An example is Richmond Barthe's *Boxer*.

Abstract: Abstract sculpture shocked American audiences with the now famous / infamous Armory Show of 1913, which echoed the values of Marinetti's "Futurist Manifesto" which stated that representational art was a slave to bourgeois "elitist" values. European sculptors such as Constantin Brancusi (Romanian) whose *Torso of Mademoiselle Pogany*, shocked the exhibit-goers, deeply inspired and influenced Americans. Others, with "found art" included French-American Marcel Duchamp, who exhibited a urinal as though it were a neo-classicist sculpture.

Modernist: American modernist sculpture moved away from representational, realistic art as it sought to propose an art form that represented the potential of humanity to overcome limitations on human ambition imposed by old aristocratic or religious institutions. The dominant motif of "breaking free" and also of "machine-nature-human creation" were common. Sculptures were broken into Cubist-influenced block shapes, or captured like individual frames of film, or alternatively represented as motion-machines (cars, planes, trains), or cyborg-like superhumans. Dehumanization represented liberation. Examples include Jacques Lipchitz, Alexander Calder, and Gaston Lachaise.

Social Commentary: The latter part of the 20th century was populated by sculpture with a message, and usually of social commentary, subversion of institutions, or the desire for reform. Super-realistic sculpture embraced working class subjects, and defied the notions of Neo-Classical art which idealized and sought to impose classical notions of beauty. Institutions such as the Catholic church were critiqued by creating sculptures out of scatological materials (elephant dung, for example), and social inequality was depicted in a number of ways, often with the use of unusual materials, and by echoing while subverting a classical or well-known work of art, often a monument that embodied the values the artist sought to challenge (or interrogate). The sculpture took on the role of artist along with that of critic and also social architect, and his / her written commentary became as important as the physical work. In Canada, First Nations motifs have been incorporated to both honor the people, culture, and contributions.

Discussion/Questions

1. Mounds and geoglyphs have been found in different parts of North America. They resemble in many ways the Nazca Lines found in the desert of Peru. It has been observed that the best (and perhaps only) way to truly see these glyphs is by flying above them. Otherwise, they're not really observable or distinguishable. What are your thoughts about the earthworks (geoglyphs and lines). What might they be communicating, and what is their purpose?
2. The first Europeans in North America creates sculptures that had to do with religious ceremonies and the continuity / emotional assurance of religious beliefs and values. Please compare and contrast the use of sculptures in the early Catholic missions versus the low-relief carvings on marble tombstones in New England.
3. In the 19th century, the use of sculpture to assert the new American identity was used in many different places and ways. Please list three different ways in which sculpture was used and how it both affirmed a national identity and connected the individual to a sense of hope and potential self-actualization and transformation.
4. Sculpture in the 20th century began to focus on different messages than that of the 19th century. In addition to identity, the messages were multiple and had to do with the role of technology in society, the capacity of technology to transform people and society for the good, the way that technology could be used to interject fear of extermination, the subversion of the "eternal verities" as represented by big government and big religion, and the substitution of consumer culture for religious or political self-actualizing aspiration. Please select three works that call into questions traditional values and explain how and why they do so.

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ARCHITECTURE

Overview Architecture has always been more than simply providing shelter from the elements or storage for one's chattels. The design, materials, and workmanship have attested to the diversity of human accomplishment, and they also reflect ingenuity and resourcefulness. Further, the sheer diversity of origins and the desire to maintain a connection to one's home country by means of the architecture has resulted in an often dizzying mélange or pastiche of competing cultures. Further, the tension between the "build to for permanence" vs "build for impermanence and perpetual change" is often jarring, particularly in late 20th-century suburbs and strip malls. In North America, as in other countries, architecture communicates a message (or messages) and provides the opportunity for a multi-faceted discussion of cultural contexts, the availability of resources, technology, tools, and the prevailing beliefs, values, and dreams. Architects design buildings and spaces in order to elicit certain desired responses in the people who use them, which sets up yet another fascinating area of study; that is, the psychological and sociological impact of architectural design on human behavior and beliefs. In America after the arrival of the Europeans, mythologies and dreams of infinite opportunities for self-actualization have abounded, and the prevailing notion that a person can actually reinvent himself or herself has been reflected in much of the architecture, often with stunning results.

PreHistory

Clovis culture (18,000 – 8,000 BC): The Clovis people inhabited caves which they decorated with cave paintings and carvings. The petroglyphs that remain today correspond to animals, people, and geometric shapes and spirals.

Classical

Southwest Pueblo (1200 BCE – 1300 AC): The Pueblo Indians constructed elaborate cliff dwellings as well as structures using adobe. The designs reflected a view of well-organized communal living and mutual support.

Eastern Woodlands (1000 BCE – 1000 AD): The civilizations of the Eastern Woodlands were known for creating towns consisting of log buildings which they called long houses. In the swampy parts of the southeast, they built houses on stilts. The long houses were often used for ceremonial purposes, while the storage and sleeping quarters were more informal.

Mississippian (800 – 1500 AD): The builders of vase mounds, low pyramids, and platforms were masters of large-scale structures along with elaborate drainage systems. For the most part, the designs incorporated straight lines and clear geometrical shapes such as in the structures known as Cahokia near St. Louis, Missouri. However, a dramatic exception occurs at the Serpent Mound in Ohio which takes the form of what appear to be sine waves, or, as is commonly believed, the shape of a snake.

Colonial (Early Modern)

Dutch Colonial: The Dutch settled in what is now New York, first along Long Island and then far up the Hudson and Mohawk Rivers. They built forts, trading / commercial centers that utilized a great deal of stone and brick, following models in Holland, Belgium, and Flanders.

Spanish Colonial: Consistency with Spain was very important to the early conquistadores and priests who settled the Spanish-dominated parts of North America. By incorporating the baroque style of the most impressive cathedrals of Spain, they were able to communicate a message of power, wealth, and an unassailable connection to the monarchy in Spain. Structures in the Spanish-controlled part of North America included missions, cathedrals, churches, governmental buildings, and homes.

French Colonial: For the French, it was a matter of deep importance to send the message that French culture, language, and way of life were in all ways superior to all others. While no French architects in America attempted to copy Versailles in America, the French did leave a very unique style in New Orleans and also in Quebec. In the colonial era, the French built forts, trading centers, governmental centers, and churches which often echoed the chateau styles and also the Gothic cathedrals such as Notre Dame.

New England Colonial: The settlers constructed homes using oak frames and clapboard siding which were copied from English country and town houses. The fact that the settlers opted for the familiar rather than inventing new forms certainly suggests a lingering sense of affiliation if not outright nostalgia for one's origins. At the same time, the American colonial styles began incorporating Neoclassical elements which suggests a break from tradition and a need to legitimize this grand new experiment.

Georgian: The primary function of the early use for the Georgian style during Colonial times was to indicate class and connections to wealth, titles, and property in England. The incorporation of the Georgian styles also reflects an admiration for George III who was a champion of progressive architecture, focusing on labor-saving hygienic innovations. The Baroque followed the examples of Sir Christopher Wren. The Palladian was typified by balance and symmetry, as in the works of Renaissance architect Andrea Palladio. The most famous example is The White House in Washington, D. C.

Nineteenth Century

Neoclassical: Federal Style: The new nation was eager to use architecture to express its idealistic vision. Used primarily for government buildings, the Neoclassical Federal Style suggested planning, symmetry, and grandeur of vision. The connection to the Greek and Roman foundations of Western civilization were expressed in form that communicated the idealistic visions expressed in Plato's Republic and Aristotle's Nicomachean Ethics. Charles Bullfinch and William Thornton designed many of the buildings in Washington, D.C., most notably the U.S. Capitol Building and the Massachusetts State House. In addition to symmetrical buildings, they also contributed to the design of the streets, drainage systems, and thoroughfares of the nation's capitol.

Neoclassical: Greek Revival: Thomas Jefferson and Benjamin Latrobe were advocates of the Greek Revival Neoclassical style which liberally adopted many of the artistic elements of the temples and buildings of ancient Greece. Most notable were domes, pillars, and the proportions of the rooms, doors, and windows. Monticello is an example of the Greek Revival style.

Carpenter Gothic: Taking advantage of lumber and the abundance of skilled labor, along with a prevailing philosophy that used decoration and adornments to communicate an optimistic view of life, and the celebrate one's personal achievements and material success, architects developed a uniquely American style, the Carpenter Gothic. Highly stylized wooden ornamentation took the form of "gingerbread" (wood filigree) which was created using the "scroll saw." The design is considered a naïve style which incorporated some of what people believed to be characteristics of Gothic style, including elaborate trim, turrets, spires, and pointed arches.



Carpenter Gothic

Late Gothic Revival: Revivals of older styles are often a response to modernity and a pulling back from some of the more disturbing aspects of industrialization. The Gothic Revival in architecture celebrates prosperity and the ability to achieve self-expression. Yet, at the same time, it represents the desire to establish continuity with a Romantic, medieval, mysterious time (as opposed to the positivistic rationalism of the new nation (reflected in Federalist Neoclassicism). Gothic is romantic, expressive, irrational, and asymmetrical. Hallmarks of the style include diamond panes, oriel windows, steep roofs, Gothic decorative motifs (cusps, arches, trefoils), and an abundance of “gingerbread.”



Gothic Revival

<https://architecturestyles.org/gothic-revival/>

Second Empire: Popular during the middle part of the 19th century, “Second Empire” adopted French architectural details such as the mansard roof. The message communicated by the design was that of a connection to the cultural values of the French, and an assumed sophistication. In addition to the use of mansard roofs and rounded windows, there was a great deal of wrought iron.



Sharon House, Davenport, Iowa

http://www.livingplaces.com/architecturalstyles/li/Second_Empire-540x405.jpg

Frontier Architecture: The Homestead Act, which deeded 160 acres to people who constructed a home on the property, resulted in a boom in functional homes that would serve as shelter, and which took full use of local building materials, which ranged from field stone to adobe and logs. Frontier designs were principally functional, but they also made the gesture to communicate the goal of claiming as their own the American frontier. Thus, it was often the case that buildings were designed to look many times their actual size by means of false fronts. Perhaps the most important building in the frontier towns (besides the jail) was the train station, which was positioned in the middle of the country’s vascular system through which the life blood of commerce flowed.

Twentieth Century

Skyscrapers: (Early): People both embraced and resisted industrialization and the thrust toward modernism and all its attendant philosophical notions. Technology made new accomplishments possible, and where the tallest building in the town was typically a spire of a church or cathedral, in the new city, the churches were supplanted by the skyscrapers, the new “Cathedrals of Commerce.” The early skyscrapers were very functional, and had as a goal to lead the eye skyward.

Art Nouveau: In many ways, art nouveau represented a resistance to industrialization and the materials of factories and machines. The antithesis of mechanical and linear, art nouveau was characterized by a highly decorative, organic feeling with shapes that borrowed from nature. Characteristic of art nouveau was the presence of plants, flowers, vines, in wrought iron and stained glass. Art nouveau contained a blend of geometric and flowing forms and was often incorporated in the Arts and Crafts movement.

Art Deco: Deeply influenced by modernist art and the philosophical writings of the Futurists (namely the Futurist Manifesto by Marinetti), the Art Deco movement broke from past aesthetics, namely Revival movements and embraced simple, clean, and high-performance materials such as chrome, brushed

aluminum, and leathers. It embraced air travel and the automobile, and many building designs incorporated symbols and motifs that looked like propellers, etc. The French government sponsored a show in 1925 in Paris that showcased the new design. Named the Exposition Internationale des Arts Decoratifs et Industriels Modernes (1925), the show gave rise to the name, Art Deco. Because of the fascination with technological innovation, skyscrapers were a perfect location to incorporate the principles of Art Deco. Perhaps the most famous example is the Chrysler Building in New York, designed by William van Alen.

The International Style: Another prominent show influenced a generation of architects, who embraced the underlying ideas which had first appeared in Europe. The show, the International Exhibition of Modern Architecture, was held in 1932 at the Museum of Modern Art (MOMA) in New York. The show included only the purest examples of modernist architectures and they had to adhere to a set of principles. The most prominent characteristics were: 1) no ornamentation; 2) functional and logical floor plans; 3) balance rather than symmetry; 4) the prominent use of glass for the façade and steel for exterior support, with concrete for interior supports and floors. Prominent architects included Mies van der Rohe, Eliel Saarinen, and Gropius.

Naturalism: (Falling Waters): Frank Lloyd Wright, whom most writers consider the greatest American architect, transformed architecture with his naturalistic view of design. Based in Chicago, Wright was deeply influenced by Japanese architecture, which he incorporated into a concept of “organic architecture” which focused on developing a harmonious relationship between the parts of the building and its natural setting. He developed the famous “prairie houses” in which one can easily see the elements of Japanese bath houses and homes in the sense that they have low, wide profiles, low sloping roofs with long projections, and bands of windows. As his style developed, Wright began to include more Japanese and pre-Columbian art influences. He continued to include the environment, especially peaceful pools of water, and also the incorporation of spirals and circles, not only in homes but also in corporate spaces. His masterpiece is Fallingwater, located in Bear Run, Pennsylvania.

Corporate Modernism: Growing from the International Style, Corporate Modernism came to dominate architecture in the last half of the twentieth-century to the point that it almost became almost the only acceptable option. Mies van der Rohe designed the first steel and glass skyscraper, New York’s Seagram Building (1954-58), which is notable for its stark verticality, the curtain wall of bronze and glass, and a grid pattern (windows). The base consists of green travertine columns, all in a very minimalist style. The architecture communicates a message of powerful vertical projection to connect with soaring ambitions and strength. Avoiding the echoes of religious architecture that one might see in the spire-like Chrysler Building, Mies’s Seagram Building, and other examples such as the United Nations Building (designed by Le Corbusier) and the Inland Steel Building in Chicago, projected power, strength, austerity, and an almost Sparta-type warrior adherence to corporate mission.

Decorative Formalism: Not everyone agreed with the almost aggressive austerity of Corporate Modernism, even as they did wish to project through architectural design core values that informed a positive, almost utopian embrace of progress for progress’s sake and innovative technology as the driver of human prosperity and happiness. The architects embraced curvilinear forms the resulted in a formal expressiveness, with the goal of being simultaneously calming and euphoria-producing. Examples include Saarinen’s TWA terminal at New York’s JFK International Airport and Louis Isadore Kahn’s the Yale University Art Gallery, New Haven (1951-53); the Richards Medical Research Laboratories at the University of Pennsylvania in Philadelphia (1957-65); the Salk Institute for Biological Studies at La Jolla, in California (1959-65); and the Kimbell Art Museum in Fort Worth (1966-72).

Postmodernist Architecture: A backlash to the extreme forms of modernism which eschewed all ornamentation and was purely functional occurred in the 1970s, when the attempt to rehumanize public architecture occurred. It is useful to note that modernism in architecture tended to be utopian; for example, housing projects and large city projects were envisioned in an ultra-modern format, which would allow the maximum number of people to work, live, and interact in a very democratic way. Unfortunately, some public housing projects that were built using large modernist designs had the unfortunate destiny of becoming centers of crime and urban decay. One particularly notorious example was the 1955 Pruitt-Igoe

housing project in St. Louis, Missouri for which the architect, Minoru Yamasaki received awards. In just 20 years, the project (33 11-story slab apartment buildings) had become so crime-infested and poorly maintained that it was declared unfit for human habitation and demolished in 1975. As a result, architects tried to change the approach to urban design and to re-introduce green spaces, curves, ornamentation and “humanizing” elements. That included incorporating echoes of famous historical architectural styles of the past. Essentially, critics blamed the harsh lines of modernist architecture of the projects for inciting violence, crime, and drug addiction. Postmodernist design encouraged blending of motifs and an eclectic approach to create more harmonious environments. Examples include Robert Stern’s design for the Prospect Point and the Denver Public Library, designed by Michael Graves (1995).



Post-Modernist Architecture - Denver Public Library - <https://www.failedarchitecture.com/wp-content/uploads/2015/12/denver-830x587.jpg>



Modernist Architecture – the Pruitt-Igoe Public Housing Project, 1955.
<http://www.pruitt-igoe.com/YAMA/wp-content/uploads/2010/09/P-I99.jpg>

Deconstructivism: Pushing the limits of technological and structural possibilities, plus challenging existing aesthetics standards (essentially attributing aesthetics to taste enforced by the dominant culture), architects such as Gehry disassembled, disarmed, and deconstructed the forms, traditions, and conventions of traditional architecture. Frank O. Gehry, Daniel Libeskind, Rem Koolhaas, Peter Eisenman, Zaha Hadid, Bernard Tschumi and the Co-op Himmelblau group explored an architecture that was deliberately in opposition to the values of the past. They emphasized disharmony, irregularity, and seemingly impossible physical proportions.



The Dancing House (Frank O. Gehry), Prague

Discussion/Questions

1. Early architecture integrated itself with the landscape and the climate. The functions of the architecture tended to revolve around society-building ritual as well as providing shelter for families and the community. Describe how the early civilizations of the Americas developed designs that took advantage of local materials and explain how they decorated them in ways that reinforced the rituals and ceremonies held there.
2. Colonial era architecture represented rather contradictory feelings about their relationship with Europe. On the one hand, they established a connection to the elements of culture they wanted to affirm. They did that by imitating or modifying European examples. At the same time, there was a strong desire to break from the traditions of the past and establish a uniquely American identity. Please identify examples of colonial architecture that adopts European traditions. Then identify examples of architecture that makes a break from the past by using new materials and by focusing on functionalism.
3. In the 19th century, industrialization was simultaneously embraced and feared. Describe examples of architecture that embraced the Industrial Revolution by incorporating materials and design elements. Then, identify examples of architecture that romanticized the past, particularly medieval times, by incorporating elements from castles, cathedrals, etc.
4. Twentieth-century architecture has been described as extremely utopian in its design, but dystopian in its ultimate actualization or realization. Describe the optimism and sense of human potential embodied in modernist architecture and find examples. Then, describe how the modernist designs were accused of having a negative impact on the human spirit, and how postmodernist designs sought to ameliorate that impact.

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