

Press Release

Brooklyn Museum



Tjeu Remy, designer (Dutch, born 1960). Droog Design, Design Cooperative, manufacturer, Amsterdam, Netherlands (founded 1993). *Chest of Drawers*, "You Can't Lay Down Your Memories," designed 1991, made 2005. Maple, other woods, painted and unpainted metals, plastic, paper, textile. Gift of Joseph F. McCrindle in memory of J. Fuller Feder, 2005.36. © Droog Design. (Photo: Brooklyn Museum)

Brooklyn Museum Unveils Newly Renovated Galleries for its Decorative Arts Collection

Design: 1880 to Now features furniture, ceramics, glass, and metalwork and looks beyond traditional Eurocentric narratives. Also on view are new contemporary acquisitions by Roberto Lugo, Masanori Umeda, and Shiro Kuramata.

The Brooklyn Museum draws from its rich holdings of decorative objects and unveils newly-renovated Decorative Arts galleries to present *Design: 1880 to Now*. This is the wing's first renovation to take place since its galleries opened in 1971, and the installation similarly reimagines the collection and looks beyond traditional Eurocentric narratives with a display of works from the 19th century to the present day.

Design: 1880 to Now is organized by guest curator Aric Chen, independent curator and Curatorial Director of Design Miami, with Shea Spiller, Curatorial Assistant, Arts of the Americas and Europe. Additional curatorial contributions are provided by Catherine Futter, Senior Curator, and Elizabeth St. George, Assistant Curator, Decorative Arts, Brooklyn Museum. The renovation is led by Kenneth Kurtz, Museum Architect. The installation honors the late Dr. Barry R. Harwood, Curator of Decorative Arts at the Brooklyn Museum from 1988 to 2018.

"It was a privilege to work with the Museum—and before his passing, Barry Harwood—on this reinstallation, which aims to further draw out the many strengths of the collection, while expanding its narratives in ways the Museum will no doubt continue to build on," says Chen.

“It was important to respect how the collection was formed—there’s an element here of presenting a history of the history of design—while adding new perspectives and laying groundwork for exciting and more inclusive future directions.”

“We are very excited to unveil the redesign of our Decorative Arts galleries, which has been a three-year project in the making,” says Anne Pasternak. “To be able to honor Dr. Harwood in this way is very fitting and makes this moment doubly special. We have an incredible collection that I can’t wait to reintroduce to our visitors.”

Exhibition sections and highlights

The works on view offer competing visions of modernity as they highlight pressing themes from the era including tensions between craft and industry, innovations in production, and issues of cultural appropriation. Featured objects illuminate the complex trajectory of design history and look beyond traditional Eurocentric narratives of the past to include important issues of global exchange. *Design: 1880 to Now* pays particular attention to the influence of Chinese and Japanese culture on European and American decorative arts in the 19th and 20th centuries, European exploitation of labor, and problematic representations of East Asian and African cultures, which persist today.

Organized into sixteen sections, the works on view in *Design: 1880 to Now* exemplify a range of the styles and design movements that were popularized during this period. Focusing on new perspectives within these movements, the exhibition considers the Arts and Crafts movement from Britain to the United States; French Art Deco’s “Moderne Luxury”; the Machine Age, with a particular focus on female designers; and the influence of modern materials such as tubular steel in “From Bicycles to the Bauhaus” or molded plywood in “Democratizing Design in the Mid-twentieth Century.” While reimagining the collection, the exhibition also examines key figures in design from the mid-19th century onward, with a focus on international exchange through designers such as Gerrit Rietveld, Pierre Legrain, and Frederick Kiesler. The section “Louis Comfort Tiffany: Favrite Glass and Stained-Glass Lamps” pays particular attention to the labor history of these famous objects, which were designed and fabricated in a mostly female-operated studio. “After Modern” challenges the canon with an emphasis on designers who typified playful postmodern and contemporary expression such as Ettore Sottsass, Isabelle Moore, Tejo Remy, and Jeroen Verhoeven.

The installation also brings several newly-acquired contemporary works into cross-period conversations. In “Seeing America through the Century Vase,” Roberto Lugo’s 2019 *Brooklyn Century Vase*, which portrays a complex and diverse America seen through the lens of Brooklyn by paying tribute to the borough’s African American legend, is paired with the iconic 1876 *Century Vase* by Karl H. L. Mueller. Sections such as “Asia and the Decorative Arts” and “Cultural Appropriation and the Aesthetic Movement” challenge Asian representation across periods. “Japanese Modern” features two new acquisitions—*Ginza Cabinet* by Masanori Umeda, a robot cabinet that offers a playful example of postmodern furniture design, and is one of sixteen important gifts from the collection of George Kravis II to the Museum; and Shiro Kuramata’s *Feather Stool*, a poetic piece with dyed Mallard duck feathers seemingly floating in its transparent acrylic base—alongside works by Japanese modernists such as Sori Yanagi and Ubunji Kikodoro.

Renovation

The renovation opens up the gallery spaces, makes the artworks more visible, improves accessibility, and encourages better visitor flow in the 3,000 square foot space. A wall that limited visibility and entry from the Sackler Center has been removed, previously installed heavy wooden ramps have been lightened with transparent glass railings, floor-to-ceiling glass barriers were removed, and the openings to display spaces have been widened.

Visitors will now be able to step into the Weil-Worgelt Study (ca. 1928-1930), where the small bar (hidden in the corner in defiance of Prohibition) is visible for the first time since the room's installation in 1971. Additionally, the gallery walls have been freshened up with new coats of paint and accents of electric green along the corridor. The entire exhibition space, formerly known as the 20th-century Corridor, has been brightened with new lighting.

The Collection

The Brooklyn Museum's outstanding collection of more than 34,000 mostly American and European decorative art objects comprises a wide range of furniture, silver, glass, ceramics, and textiles from the 17th century onwards. The earliest pieces of decorative art to enter the collection were silver spoons that came to the Museum in 1902, followed the next year by a number of pieces of European porcelain. With the arrival of Luke Vincent Lockwood, a noted collector and scholar, in 1914, the focus of the collections shifted from Europe to America. During the 1930s, the Museum began actively collecting modern design, focusing on design's relationship to industry, and organizing numerous landmark exhibitions on the subject.

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Leadership support for this installation is provided by Dr. Susan Weber. Generous support is provided by Julian A. Treger.

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