

ABOUT THE WOLFSONIAN COLLECTION

The Wolfsonian's collection contains more than 100,000 objects, rare books, ephemeral items and archives of mostly North American and European origin from the period 1885 to 1945. Ranging from furniture and other decorative artworks to graphic design, objects reflect the social, political and technological changes that dominated the world during this pivotal time and demonstrate the vital role that design played in shaping perceptions of the modern world. In addition, library holdings are especially strong in materials relating to world's fairs and international expositions; political propaganda; architecture; travel and transportation; technological and industrial design; commercial art; book design and typography; and the WPA (Works Progress Administration). Progressive and avant-garde design movements are well represented in the areas of Arts and Crafts, Art Nouveau, Art Moderne, Futurism and Constructivism.

These cultural artifacts reveal as much about our own times as they do about the times in which they were created. The collection themes include:

British Aesthetic and Arts and Crafts Movements

Among The Wolfsonian's specialties is the largest public collection of British Aesthetic movement and Arts and Crafts movement (1870–1910) objects outside the United Kingdom. In works associated with these movements, designers eschewed the anonymity and mechanism of industrialism in favor of handcrafted, historically referential, and often vernacular design. British Arts and Crafts reformers believed that the industrial process had stripped craftspeople of their individuality and vowed to change society by changing the nature of work: the craftsperson could again control the design process and make objects by hand. Among The Wolfsonian's holdings are important works by William Morris, Christopher Dresser, C.R. Ashbee, M.H. Baillie Scott, Ernest Gimson and Charles Rennie Mackintosh.



Presentation bowl for Mr. James William Lowther and Mrs. Mary Frances Lowther, June 1905
Designed by Robert Hilton (British, dates unknown)
Made by R. Temple and T. Clark at the Keswick School of Industrial Arts, Keswick, England
Silver, 12 1/2 x 12 mother-of-pearl
TD1990.6.9

Nieuwe Kunst and Stile Floreale: Dutch and Italian Art Nouveau

The Wolfsonian also holds an extensive array of objects representing Dutch Nieuwe Kunst and Italian Stile Floreale, among the most outstanding collections outside the Netherlands and Italy. These Italian and Dutch manifestations of the movement commonly known as Art Nouveau date to the period 1890–1910 and refer to objects inspired by forms found in nature, particularly plants. Notably, the collection includes whole period rooms, such as a double parlor with complete furnishings by Agostino Lauro, and an interior by Theodoor Nieuwenhuis.



Desk, 1901
Designed by Alberto Issel (Italian, 1848–1926)
Oak, metal, leather, fabric, and paint
Genoa, Italy
88.32.11.16.1

German Design Reform

The Wolfsonian houses the largest public collection of objects associated with German Design Reform (1880–1910) outside of Germany. These objects are significant to the history of hand- and machine-made decorative arts and are generally seen as precursors of Modernism. Beginning in the late 1890s, German artists and architects searched for a new theoretical and stylistic vocabulary appropriate to German design; work of this period is characterized by the conspicuous intention to create a national vocabulary for modernity. Wolfsonian collections include examples by members of the leading art colonies, workshops and design associations: the Darmstadt Art Colony, Vereinigte Werkstätten in Munich and Deutsche Werkbund. Particularly noteworthy are a suite of furniture by August Endell and a wide variety of designs by Peter Behrens and Joseph Maria Olbrich.



Electric Teakettle, model no. 3599, 1909
Peter Behrens (German, 1868-1940)
Brass, wicker
8 x 7 x 6"
1994.7.1

American Industrial Design

American Industrial Design (1915–1940) is well represented in the Wolfsonian collection with items such as cameras, clocks, radios and phonographs. Most of the pioneers of industrial design are represented, including Walter Dorwin Teague, Donald Deskey, Kem Weber and John Vassos. The collection also contains an extremely valuable selection of materials pertaining to print advertising: posters, graphic design, patent models, trade catalogs and sales samples.



Radio, model no. 1186, Nocturne, c. 1935
Walter Dorwin Teague (American, 1883-1960)
Glass, metal, wood
45 x 43 x 15"
XX1990.168

Transportation and Travel-Related Themes:

The Wolfsonian holds an impressive range of objects relating to travel—ocean liners, airplanes, zeppelins and trains—from the 1885-1945 period. The numerous objects include posters, prints, books, toys, models, paintings and ephemera (e.g., souvenirs, postcards, brochures and menus).



Fan, c. 1935
Manufactured by Aeros, Germany
TD1990.323.1

World's Fairs and Expositions

Another central element of the collection is materials produced for or exhibited in world's fairs and expositions since 1851. The Wolfsonian collection is unique as an all-inclusive compilation of world's fair materials, encompassing catalogs and rare books, furnishings, paintings and sculpture, and ephemera such as scarves, postcards, pamphlets, toys and ashtrays. Laden with nationalistic implications, these objects stand out as some of the best examples of their kind in the world.



Poster, 1939 World's Fair on San Francisco Bay Golden Gate International Exposition, 1939
Designed by Shawl, Nyeland & Seavey
34 x 26"
85.4.105

Political Propaganda

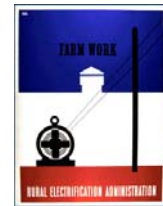
The Wolfsonian contains the country's largest collection of twentieth-century German and Italian political propaganda, including prints, posters, drawings, books and serial holdings and objects that document the rise and demise of the fascist movements in these nations. The museum's British and Dutch propaganda holdings are the most comprehensive in the United States. Taken together, these collections contribute to the analysis and study of shared imagery among countries with very different political systems.



Sculpture, *Profilo continuo del Duce* (Continuous profile of Mussolini), 1933
Renato Bertelli (Italian, 1900–74)
Florence
Later manufactured by Ditta Effeffe, Milan, with Mussolini's approval, patent no. 1073
Bronzed terra-cotta
11 x 9"
84.6.4

New Deal America

The Wolfsonian holds an enormous collection of designs produced by the Works Progress Administration (WPA) and the Federal Art Project in the United States. Although these collections are not unique in this country, The Wolfsonian's holdings are unusual for their vastness and exceptionally good condition. The range of media is broad—paintings and sculpture, ceramics, lithographs, etchings and posters—with special strength demonstrated in the area of drawings and studies for post office murals.



Poster, *Farm Work. Rural Electrification*, 1937
Designed by Lester Beall (American, 1903–1969)
Published by the Rural Electrification Administration,
Washington D.C.
Silkscreen
TD1991.174.1