

Modernism in American Silver: 20th Century Design / Jewel Stern.—Dallas, TX: Dallas Museum of Art; New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, October 2005.--392 p.: ill. – ISBN 0-300-10927-X (cl.): \$75.00.



Modernism in American Silver is an exhibition catalog so beautifully produced and profusely illustrated that it is easy to be swept away by the illustrations and overlook the tremendous research and scholarship that it contains. In exhaustive detail, the book explores the development of industrially produced silver from 1925 to 2000. It does not discuss handcrafted silver, and since it is focused entirely on modernism, it does not give any description or explanation of classic or historic designs, even though they make up the bulk of silver production today. It is, as the title says, a work entirely concerned with modernism in this material, and within this area it does a magnificent and exhaustive job of explaining the development, history, and marketing of modern silver.

The Dallas Museum of Art (DMA) developed its collection of modern silver largely with the assistance of one woman, Jewel Stern. Her extensive research is the basis of this book, although essays by some of the curators responsible for the exhibition are also included. Stern's collection has become the core of the DMA modern silver collection. The essay by Charles Venable, currently deputy director for collections and programs at the Cleveland Museum of Art, and previously curator of decorative arts at the DMA, describes the development of DMA's collection of both modern and nineteenth century silver.

Modernism in American Silver follows a chronological organization, without religiously adhering to that organization. The contributors discuss all aspects of industrial silver, placing design and exhibitions in the larger context of art movements in the twentieth century, as well as showing how world events influenced the production of, and market for, these pieces. Another repeated discussion topic is the ways in which the social changes of the twentieth century influenced the use and design of silver. Striking illustrations document the struggle of manufacturers to market what is often seen as a very formal and luxurious product to a society becoming increasingly more casual. Sadly, the market for silver has dropped drastically in the latter part of the last century and the book reflects that; approximately half of the book is devoted to the years, 1925-1950, and half to the years 1950-2000.

The text discusses many companies and designers in detail and provides illustrations of their works. In addition, biographical and artistic information about lesser known designers is included at the end of the catalog; given the relative difficulty of finding information on industrial designers, this is an enormously useful section. Additionally, the volume documents all the works in the exhibition, providing make, pattern name, if known, and a short discussion of the piece. Each chapter has extensive endnotes. The illustrations and photographs are lavish and superb. In addition to depictions of the works, the volume also includes images of historic silver exhibitions, advertisements of various periods, and photographs of designers.

This book is highly recommended for libraries with a collection interest in modern and contemporary decorative arts or industrial design. It is a fascinating book that presents silver design and describes how the events of history affect the products, designs, and companies.

Karen DeWitt, Head, Design Library, North Carolina State University--Raleigh, karen_dewitt@ncsu.edu

Published and Copyright held by ARLIS/NA