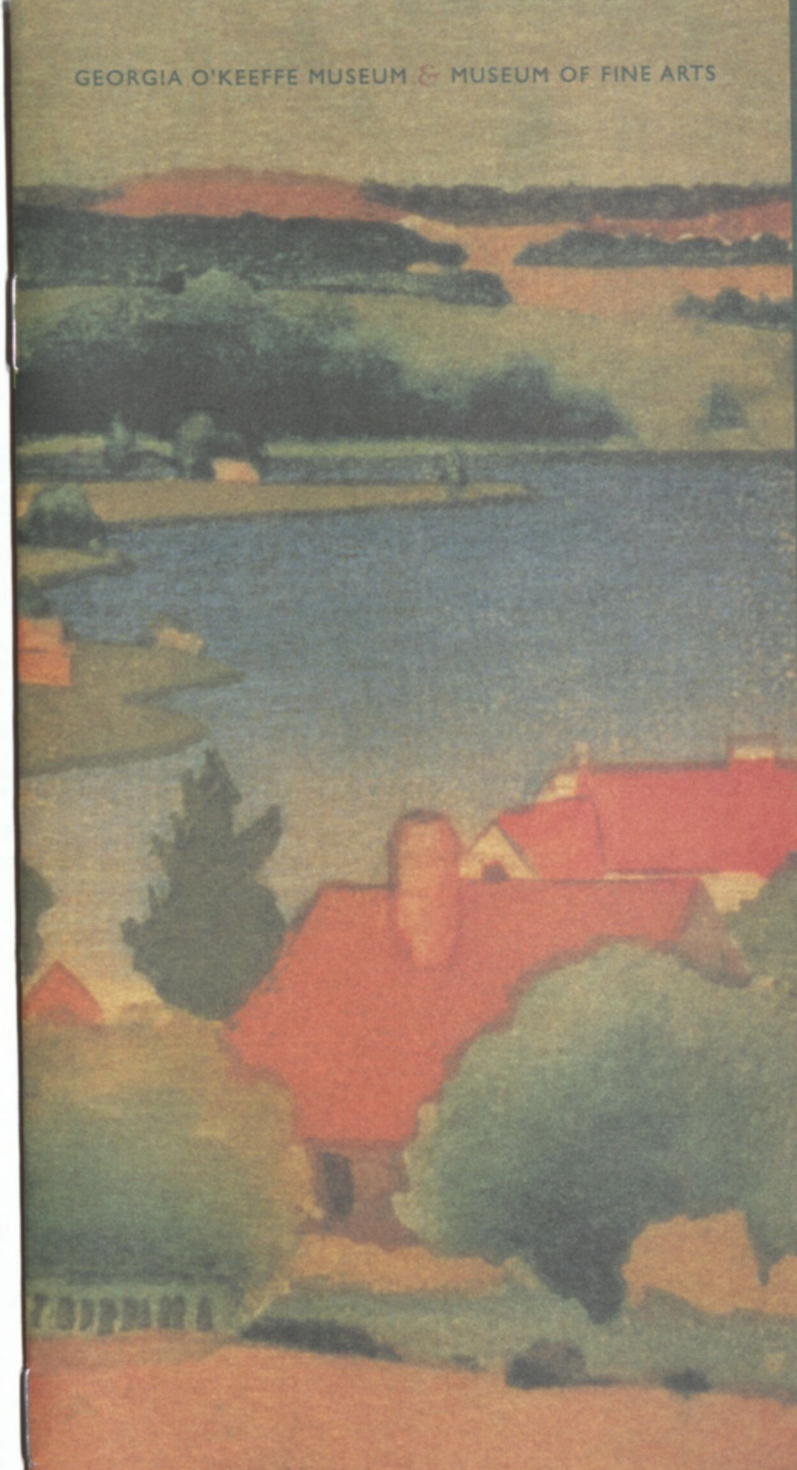


GEORGIA O'KEEFFE MUSEUM & MUSEUM OF FINE ARTS

MARCH 10 - JUNE 18, 2000

ORIENTATION GUIDE



ARTHUR WESLEY DOW
American Arts & Crafts



ARTHUR WESLEY DOW *American Arts & Crafts*

ARTHUR WESLEY DOW (1857–1922) was an artist and photographer as well as being one of this country's most innovative and influential art educators. Over a 30-year period, he taught at Teachers College, Columbia University; the Art Students League; Pratt Institute; and his own Ipswich Summer School of Art.

Cover: Arthur Wesley Dow
A BEND IN THE RIVER, c. 1895
color woodcut, 5 x 2 1/2 in.
Collection George and Barbara Wright

MANY OF AMERICA'S leading ceramicists, furniture-makers, painters, photographers, and printmakers were Dow's students, and the works of many of them are included in this exhibition: Alvin Langdon Coburn, Pedro de Lemos, Georgia O'Keeffe, Bror (B.J.O.) Nordfeldt, Edward Steichen, and Max Weber.

The exhibition includes both two- and three-dimensional works by these and many others artists. Paintings, prints, lithographs, photographs, woodcuts, and other two-dimensional works are on view at the Georgia O'Keeffe Museum. The three-dimensional objects, such as ceramics, furniture, and textiles, can be seen at the Museum of Fine Arts.

The ideas about art-making that Dow began to develop in the late 1870s were quite revolutionary for the time. That is, he proposed that copying nature, a process that had formed the basis of academic art instruction for more than 400 years, was at a dead end. In his mind, modern artists should study the elements of composition—Line, Mass, and Color—to come to a “new appreciation of all forms of art and the beauty of nature.”

Influenced by his study of various world culture—African, Greek, Italian, Native American, and, in particular, Chinese and Japanese—Dow became increasingly committed to the idea that artists should express their own ideas through the harmonious arrangement of line, color, and *notan* (tonal contrasts), the “trinity of power,” as he described it.

Notan is a Japanese concept involving the placement of lights and darks next to the other to read as flat shapes on the two-dimensional surface. This use of lights and darks differs dramatically from the means by which artists had traditionally manipulated these elements to create seemingly three-dimensional forms on the picture plane.

Dow and his students rejected the then accepted concept that painting and sculpture were of a higher level than the applied arts, such as ceramics, furniture, jewelry, and photography. In their minds, all art forms were of equal value and should be simultaneously beautiful and functional. As such, their work conveys the aesthetic and fundamental premise of the Arts and Crafts movement in America.

Dow's ideas and theories were published in his book, *Composition: A Series of Exercises in Art Structure for the Use of Students and Teachers* (1899), and, as this book was re-issued over the next 40 years, it influenced generations of American art students and teachers.

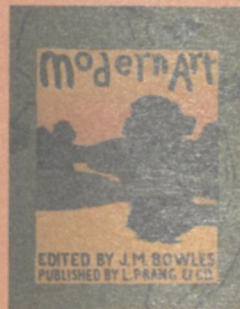
THE ARTS AND CRAFTS MOVEMENT

"In the 1880s the designers who allied themselves to the Arts and Crafts movement set out to subvert the contemporary tendency to use art as a means of signifying grandeur and power, and to propagandize a visual democracy of humble, plain, honest furniture [and other arts such as ceramics, jewelry and pottery]. What had once been considered the minor household arts became the decorative arts, which together with architecture, now took their place beside painting and sculpture."

— *Art & Crafts Style* by Isabelle Anscombe

AT THE GEORGIA O'KEEFFE MUSEUM

PRINTS in the exhibition include examples of Dow's Ipswich teaching series, which were based on his passion for the aesthetics of Japanese art. This is particularly evident in his color lithograph *Modern Art*, where contours define flat shapes that form an asymmetrical but harmonious and pleasing design.



PHOTOGRAPHY ❖ Dow believed in photography as a fine art and, thus, taught his students to look at the world in terms of how specific elements structure compositions. For example, Alvin Langdon Coburn's *The Bridge—Ipswich*, 1904, structures his photograph on the repeating blacks, grays, and whites that he has observed in both natural and human-made forms—the bridge, sky, trees, and water.

PAINTING ❖ Dow was aware of the work of European modernists, such as Gauguin, Monet, and Seurat, through his experience of living and

Arthur Wesley Dow, MODERN ART, 1895,
color lithograph, 13¹¹/₁₆ x 17³/₄ in. Collection Andrew Terry Keats.



working in Europe. Yet the modern character of his ideas about the nature of art-making arose primarily from his study of the design elements in world cultures, especially of those in Japanese art. The simplicity and elegance of the flat forms in his *August Moon*, c. 1905, reflect the aesthetic concerns of the many Japanese artists whose work he admired.

DOW'S INFLUENCE ON O'KEEFFE

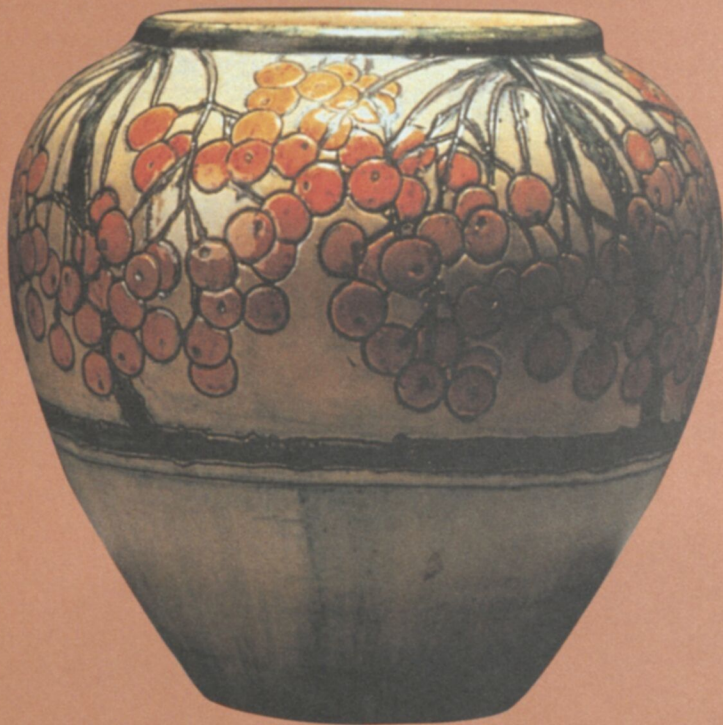
"This man had one dominating idea: to fill a space in a beautiful way and that interested me. After all, everyone has to do just this—make choices—in his daily life, even when only buying a cup and saucer. By this time [1912, when O'Keeffe discovered Dow's teaching] I had a technique for handling oil and watercolor easily; Dow gave me something to do with it." O'Keeffe's earliest known experiments with Dow's ideas are represented in the exhibition by works from a scrapbook she completed between 1912 and 1914, while she was either teaching or taking classes at the University of Virginia, Charlottesville.

Georgia O'Keeffe, PINK AND BLUE MOUNTAIN, 1916, watercolor on paper, 8⁷/₈ x 12 in. Gift of the Burnett Foundation and The Georgia O'Keeffe Foundation. © Georgia O'Keeffe Museum.

AT THE MUSEUM OF FINE ARTS

THE ARTHUR WESLEY DOW AND AMERICAN ARTS & CRAFTS exhibition emphasizes three-dimensional works at the Museum of Fine Arts. However, an introductory section acquaints visitors with works of art by Dow and his followers. Dow's aesthetics are represented by examples of his photographs, watercolors, and woodcut prints. Dow's influences on early 20th century art are shown in works by Max Weber, Edward Steichen, B.J.O. Nordfeldt, Gustave Baumann, Agnes Pelton, and Georgia O'Keeffe. Most of the works by Dow and these related artists come from the permanent collection of the Museum of Fine Arts.

CERAMICS ✪ Examples of functional ceramics from Arts & Crafts potteries, including Dedham, Newcomb, and Overbeck, demonstrate the movement's interest in designs and forms based on nature. The pottery produced by young women at Sophie Newcomb College in New Orleans, Louisiana, is particularly interesting because it was used to teach suitable skills for middle-class employment outside of the home.



The ideals of the Arts & Crafts movement promoted the formation of utopian communities, such as Byrdcliffe in Woodstock, New York. Artists, craftsmen, and writers lived and worked together in an environment that reflected a commitment to beauty, simplicity, and craftsmanship. Examples of the furniture produced at Byrdcliffe demonstrate the success of early 20th century artist communities.

The exhibition also focuses on the influence of the Arts & Crafts movement on the development of art in New Mexico. In the American Southwest, the Arts & Crafts movement stimulated the development of both art and architecture. The 1917 design of the Museum of Fine Arts Building and its original furnishings sensitively blended Arts & Crafts ideals with details based on Hispanic religious architecture. In this context, the supporters of the Arts & Crafts movement admired the pottery, weavings, and basketry produced by Native American artists as positive examples of the ideals they sought.

Opposite page: Newcomb Pottery VASE (CHINABERRY DESIGN), c. 1902, earthenware, 8 1/2 x 7 7/8 in. Thrown by Joseph Meyer, decorated by Harriet Joor. New Orleans Museum of Art, gift of Newcomb College.

Above: Byrdcliffe Colony CABINET, c. 1904, oak with polychrome panels, 27 1/4 h. x 38 x d. 14 3/4 in. Panels by Herman Dudley Murphy. Collection Mark and Jill Willcox, courtesy Robert Edwards.



WE ARE PLEASED TO PRESENT THESE LECTURES
IN CONJUNCTION WITH THE EXHIBITION

Wednesday, March 22 at 7 pm

TRUE BLUE: ARTHUR WESLEY DOW AS PHOTOGRAPHER
AND MENTOR TO PHOTOGRAPHERS

BARBARA L. MICHAELS, *art historian and critic*

Wednesday, April 12 at 7 pm

COMPOSITION: A SYNTHESIS OF ART AND DESIGN
FLORAMAE CATES, *Senior Curatorial Assistant of the Cooper-Hewitt,
National Design Museum, Smithsonian Institution*

Wednesday, May 3 at 7 pm

FANFARE FOR THE COMMON MAN: THE ENNOBLING QUALITY
OF DESIGN IN THE ARTS AND CRAFTS MOVEMENT, 1895-1914

DEREK OSTERGARD, *Associate Director and Founding Dean at The
Bard Graduate Center for Studies in the Decorative Arts, New York*

Wednesday, June 14 at 7 pm

HOME SWEET HOME

JAMES KYPRIANOS, *former curator, Ipswich Historical Society*

Lectures are held at St. Francis Auditorium, Museum of Fine Arts,

107 West Palace Avenue in Santa Fe. Tickets are \$5.

For more information, please call (505) 995-0785, x26.

Frances H. Gearhart, HIGH BLUES, n.d.

Color woodcut, 9 7/8 x 8 7/8 in. Collection Stephen Gray.

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GEORGIA O'KEEFFE MUSEUM

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