

**Alastair Duncan** was for many years an officer and consultant of Christie's, New York, and is now an independent consultant on the decorative arts of the 19th and 20th centuries. He is the author of many books on the Art Deco period, including *Art Nouveau and Art Deco Lighting*, *Art Deco Furniture*, *American Art Deco* and *Art Nouveau and Art Deco Bookbinding* (all published by Thames & Hudson).

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ART DECO COMPLETE  
—  
ALASTAIR DUNCAN

# ART DECO COMPLETE

ALASTAIR DUNCAN

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# ART DECO COMPLETE

THE DEFINITIVE GUIDE TO THE DECORATIVE ARTS OF THE 1920s AND 1930s

ALASTAIR DUNCAN

Straddling two World Wars and the Great Depression, ushering in the Jazz Age and the era of the automobile and skyscraper, fomenting in the great cities of Europe and America and shaping everything from the Golden Gate Bridge to the humble desk lamp, the story of Art Deco is the story of our modern world.

Art Deco was the most deliberately elaborate of 20th-century decorative styles. In its purest forms, it developed from a characteristically French image of luxury and refinement, often expressed in the 1920s in the use of exotic and unusual materials. Later, modernist European and American designers incorporated metal and plastic in styles described as 'Streamline Moderne', but which are now called 'Deco'. Although Paris was the spiritual home of the movement, Art Deco was a truly global style, with designers from every country in Europe and the Americas inspired by a vast international catalogue of artistic and craft traditions, ranging from ancient Egypt and the classical Mediterranean to the colonial outposts of Asia and Africa.

In the most comprehensive account of the decorative arts of the Art Deco period ever assembled, Alastair Duncan celebrates the rich variety of form and diverse international roots that have made it a perennial favourite of collectors and a constant source of inspiration for designers. The guide begins with a series of essays on the major media of the Art Deco period: Furniture and Interior Decoration; Sculpture; Paintings, Graphics, Posters and Bookbinding; Glass; Ceramics; Lighting; Textiles; Silver, Metal, Lacquer and Enamel; and Jewelry, each followed by lavishly illustrated in-depth biographies of the major designers and artists working in the medium. The second half of the book is an authoritative illustrated A-Z listing of all significant designers in the Art Deco style, comprising over four hundred entries.

Sumptuously illustrated and written by one of the world's leading experts, *Art Deco Complete* will be the definitive work on the subject for many years to come.

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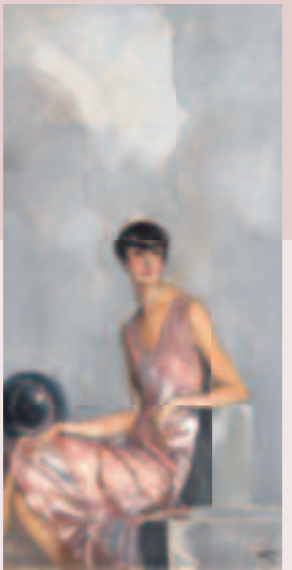
Based on a binding for *L'Ombre des jours* (Anna de Noailles), Georges Levitsky, 1938.

HERNANDEZ MONTAGNÉ RAFAEL  
Mexican lithograph poster, 1925

### PAINTINGS, GRAPHICS, POSTERS AND BOOKBINDING



The paintings of the inter-war years are difficult, if not impossible, to define in an Art Deco context. Most artists of the period employed a range of avant-garde techniques to solve traditional problems of design and composition. Almost every Modernist artist, for example, employed Cubist-inspired forms of abstraction and the bright colours of the Fauves. Artists whose work falls beyond the scope of this book, such as Fernand Léger, Piet Mondrian, Maurice de Vlaminck and Kees van Dongen, at times incorporated Art Deco motifs in their works on canvas and paper.



JUAN CABRAL DOMÍNGUEZ  
Cubists at Dinner, oil on canvas, 1925



CLARENCE CLIFF  
Book cover design for 'The Merry Widow', 1925

Those lines blur the boundaries between painters who qualify as Art Deco artists and those who do not. There are, however, two main criteria by which individual painters can be judged to fall within the Art Deco movement. First, most Art Deco artists were not in the vanguard of the painting world; that is to say, they were not themselves innovative but rather drew on themes introduced by other Modernist artists in the early years of the century. Second, their works on paper were decorative, designed to fit into and complement the fashionable surroundings of the period. They were created to conform to the style of the furnishings of the rooms in which they would hang. In this, Cubism, in some bastardized form or other, became the lingua franca of the inter-war decorative artists.

It is in this way typical of the inter-war Art Deco artist. Many of his canvases were designed as the decorative arts talents rather than those for painting alone. They were, in the final analysis, decorative rather than artistic compositions. (The same interpretation can be applied to the book illustrations and posters of the period, many of which contained images found on contemporary ceramics, glassware and sculpture.)

To most decors, the primary of the Art Deco style in painting is represented by various avian, animal, and floral motifs. Unlike their mid-century counterparts, however, these motifs were depicted within their natural habitat, the space artists chose to treat their subjects in isolation, often illuminated against a white ground. Figures – humans and panthers, in particular – snakes and elephants were popular, all painted in sharp and faceted brush strokes to reveal their innate power and rhythm.



DAVID WILKINSON  
A collection of metal, lacquer and enamel objects, 1925

UNIDENTIFIED ARTIST  
The 'Cubist' style in metal and enamel work, including the use of lacquer, is a key feature of the Art Deco movement. This piece, a clock, is a prime example of the style, featuring sharp lines and bright colors.

THE 'CUBIST' STYLE IN METAL AND ENAMEL  
A collection of metal, lacquer and enamel objects, 1925

At first the USA lagged behind France in its adoption of metalwork for interior. By the late 1920s, however, after the influence of the 1925 Exposition Internationale and the opening of Brno's New York office, French-style metalwork had become immensely popular. A number of American designers and craftsmen produced a great variety of both interior and exterior metalwork.

Clare Mack was perhaps the only manufacturer in the USA endowed with the technical prowess of the great French *bonnetiers*. Born in Germany, he emigrated to New York in 1914. He was proficient in many types of enamels and metals, and in the re-etching of copper, aluminium, bronze and chromed-nickel silver to provide colour and textural contrasts. Both worked on many of Manhattan's most outstanding buildings, including the Chrysler and Empire State Buildings and Radio City Music Hall.

William Henry 'Thunder' Thibodeau, a Hungarian emigrant, was a successful designer in several areas but was especially attracted to metalwork. His simple, two-dimensional red-ink drawings of figures and animals were inspired by the work of Henri Matisse. They came from France to the USA as the manager of Ferenbach. He was no doubt strongly influenced by Brno's work, but brought a more fanciful interpretation of machine-age angular design to a wide variety of domestic metalware and wooden furniture for a mercantile clientele in and around New York City.

Masamichi, in France, the high interest in Japanese art, inspired in the late 1920s, culminated greatly in the resurgence of interest in lacquer arts in America, who developed the most important artist to work in the medium, was followed by a famous Japanese lacquer artist Songmura, which effectively changed his career from that of manufacturer. During the 1920s he also developed trade of yellow, green and coral lacquer that had always attracted Japanese artists, and to produce top quality lacquer at a relatively low cost. To achieve this, he developed a highly personal, sometimes icy and enigmatic style in which contrasting angular images and bright colours predominated. The Cubist influence is obvious, as is the use of chrome to enhance the dramatic impact.



DAVID WILKINSON  
The Merry Widow, oil on canvas, 1925

HERNANDEZ MONTAGNÉ RAFAEL  
Mexican lithograph poster, 1925



### CLARENCE CLIFF (1899-1972)

Cliff was born in Toronto, Staffordshire, the fourth of seven children of an iron moulder. She attended the High Street Elementary School and Summerhall School in her native town. Her first job, in 1914, was a three-year apprenticeship as an engraver at the firm of J. & S. Whitson & Co., based at the Tower Works in Toronto. This she left in 1917 to join Hildburgh & Kilburn at the Union Works, where she developed a talent for ceramics while in the lithography department. During these years her parents sponsored her attendance at evening classes at the Toronto School of Art and the Burslem School of Art.

With the advent of the First World War, Cliff and Hildburgh & Kilburn for Burslem-based A. J. Wilkinson Ltd, which traded as Royal Staffordshire. There she worked initially in her hand-painted ceramic patterns, entitled 'Blanc' and quickly established her name within the industry. Despite initial criticism that was made and not advanced to the market, a solid body and enamelled in production until 1924.

Further patterns, which proved equally popular for their eye-catching glazes and lightness, were soon forthcoming, including 'Crocus', 'Chrysanthemum', 'Meadow' and 'Carnations'. Some of these were produced on streamlined Art Deco forms, which had emerged since the war. Her designs were therefore more contemporary than earlier floral and vibrant patterns about. Included among her new models, in response to customer demand, was a cup on a large plate for eating while watching television. In 1926, following her husband's death three years earlier, she sold A. J. Wilkinson Ltd. In 1929, the company was acquired by the Hildburgh & Kilburn Co. as a result of a new publication on her life and work. To today's collector, Cliff's work epitomizes the Art Deco movement in British ceramics.

In 1922, Cliff attended the Royal College of Art, London, where she studied in modelling, figure composition and the drawing classes. After a quick trip to Paris, she determined to produce colorful Art Deco designs, and was equipped in secret over the ensuing months. The first of her hand-painted ceramic patterns, entitled 'Blanc', was shown to the public in August that year and quickly established her name within the industry. Despite initial criticism that was made and not advanced to the market, a solid body and enamelled in production until 1924. Further patterns, which proved equally popular for their eye-catching glazes and lightness, were soon forthcoming, including 'Crocus', 'Chrysanthemum', 'Meadow' and 'Carnations'. Some of these were produced on streamlined Art Deco forms, which had emerged since the war. Her designs were therefore more contemporary than earlier floral and vibrant patterns about. Included among her new models, in response to customer demand, was a cup on a large plate for eating while watching television. In 1926, following her husband's death three years earlier, she sold A. J. Wilkinson Ltd. In 1929, the company was acquired by the Hildburgh & Kilburn Co. as a result of a new publication on her life and work. To today's collector, Cliff's work epitomizes the Art Deco movement in British ceramics.



Eighteen exhibited at Lord & Taylor, New York, 1925. The lacquered cabinet with single and double doors, by Joseph Sze and George G. Grey, for the building, 1925.

Opposite left: lacquered cabinet with adjustable back, made by Joseph Sze and George G. Grey, for the building, 1925. Opposite right: lacquered cabinet with adjustable back, made by Joseph Sze and George G. Grey, for the building, 1925.

Opposite right: lacquered cabinet with adjustable back, made by Joseph Sze and George G. Grey, for the building, 1925. Opposite left: lacquered cabinet with adjustable back, made by Joseph Sze and George G. Grey, for the building, 1925.

Opposite left: lacquered cabinet with adjustable back, made by Joseph Sze and George G. Grey, for the building, 1925. Opposite right: lacquered cabinet with adjustable back, made by Joseph Sze and George G. Grey, for the building, 1925.



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