

European Design Since 1985

Shaping the New Century

To help make sense of the various concepts and styles that influenced European design in the period 1985 to 2005, the exhibition's curator Craig Miller (Indianapolis Museum of Art) identifies two major currents, Modernist design and Postmodernist design. Exemplifying the dispute about design's leading motivation, Modernism prioritizes function and Postmodernism prioritizes artistic concept. The eight sections of the exhibition fall within these two larger categories.

MODERNISM

Viewed design as industry—the creation of functional, mass-produced objects.

POSTMODERNISM

Viewed design as art—the appreciation of artistic concept.

Decorative design

Based on the Postmodernist design-as-art ideal promoted by Memphis and Alchymia design groups, this approach to design was about extending a decorative, historicizing tradition.

Expressive design

This Postmodernist mode viewed the purpose of design as the creation of sculptural objects, sometimes with little regard for functional purpose.

Geometric minimal design

This approach reinvigorated one of the most influential aspects of Modernist design: the concept of functional objects based on simple geometric shapes.

Biomorphic design

Modernist in its concern for function, this approach looked to the curving forms of the natural world for inspiration.

Neo-Pop design

Harkening back to the Pop Art movement of the 1960s and '70s, this Modernist design mode celebrated a straight-forward, light-hearted, and playful aesthetic approach to object design.

Conceptual design

A movement in which concept—the idea expressed—was more important than straight-forward function.

Neo-Dada/Surreal design

Postmodernist movement akin to Conceptual design, but with non-functional objects that looked to the eeriness of the Dada and Surrealist art movements of the early twentieth century for inspiration.

Neo-Decorative design

An early twenty-first-century return to the earlier Decorative movement's embrace of ornament, this design mode brought the twenty-year cycle full circle.