

Shiseido and Three Art Styles of the Early-20th Century

Fukuhara Shinzo (1883-1948), the first president of Shiseido, transformed Shiseido into a well-known, respected, and global cosmetics company. Shinzo was the son of founder Fukuhara Arinobu. He studied art in Europe and America, where he was exposed to the newest international trends and ideas in art. These art movements included Art Nouveau, Art Deco, and the Bauhaus. With their attention to detail, beauty, and elegance, these movements were perfect tools for transforming the Shiseido image into that of a modern company. By transforming Shiseido, Shinzo changed forever the role and image of Japanese women.

Some art movements just before World War I were characterized by modernization in technology and the use of new materials. Many artisans and intellectuals were dismayed at the shoddy workmanship that often accompanied the products of the late 1800s; they longed for a more romantic time of nature and craftsmanship. Other artisans were intrigued by the possibility of creating new objects through a combination of common or exotic materials and new technology. Art Nouveau, Art Deco, and the modernism of the Bauhaus school were art forms that resulted from these desires.

Art Nouveau

Naturalistic forms, curves, and lines characterized Art Nouveau. Its most common motifs were trees, plants, and elongated, willowy women. Often a rejection of the brutish and harsh lines of the machines of the Industrial Revolution, Art Nouveau invoked a softer more romantic time when humans were in touch with the beauty of nature and craftsmanship and attention to detail mattered.

The term Art Nouveau comes from an 1895 art show held in Paris by Samuel Bing. In this show, Bing exhibited a number of works by various artists: paintings by Picasso, stained glass by Tiffany and Nabis, a Rodin sculpture. The show, held in the gallery L'Art Nouveau, was a huge success. Art Nouveau was called various things in different countries—for example, it was called *Jugendstil* in Germany, Yellow Book Style in England, and *Stile Liberty* in Italy, after the Liberty Style store in London.

American Louis Comfort Tiffany (1848–1933) was considered one of the best of the Art Nouveau artists. He combined naturalistic forms with new technology such as electricity and age-old crafts such as making stained glass. The result was unique art as well made as stained glass from the Middle Ages.

Art Nouveau was so popular it was produced all over Europe and North America. It was primarily a decorative art, but was also found in architecture, metalworking, and furniture making, as well as posters and advertising. Their beauty and refinement gave Art Nouveau images an air of elegance and style that appealed to Fukuhara. Chapter three of the *Selling Shiseido I* essay, "Marketing Beauty," provides more information on how Shiseido incorporated Art Nouveau into their advertising.

Art Deco

With the onset of World War I, the romanticism of Art Nouveau was replaced by the horror of trench warfare, death, and destruction. Among the fatalities of World War I were the royal houses of Russia, Austria, and Hungary, as well as the market for luxury goods. To counter the declining interest in consumer goods, France hosted the 1925 *Exposition Internationale des Arts Decoratifs et Industriels Modernes* (Johnson, 2003, p. 646). The goal was to reestablish the demand for luxury goods with the emphasis on modernity rather than nostalgia. The artistic style that emerged was *le style moderne*, later renamed Art Deco. This style was in vogue until World War II. While Art Deco was an international style, it was especially embraced in the United States. Its glamorization of modern technology fit with Americans' love of machines, capitalism, and growth.

In architecture, the skyscraper represented "new and modern" and was a perfect fit for Art Deco. Architects combined new materials, new technology, and older styles. The results were buildings such as the Chrysler Building, the Empire State Building, and Rockefeller Center, all in New York City.

In jewelry, artists such as Cartier combined jewels with precious metals in ways that were impossible before the 1920s. The artists often chose exotic animals, plants, and previous art styles for their design elements, combining them in a very sleek and "modern" way.

Advertising was especially influenced by Art Deco. Graphic artists used bold, bright colors in clean designs without any extra ornamentation. The lines could be straight or rounded. Machines and the exotic were favorite themes, but the constants were modernity, looking forward, and luxury. Refer to chapter three of the *Selling Shiseido I* essay, "Marketing Beauty," for more on Shiseido's use of Art Deco.

Bauhaus

Bauhaus, another design style employed by Shiseido, was an art institute started in 1919 by a group of artists and architects who wanted to improve the quality of art and architecture. Its founders included such well-known names as Ludwig Mies van der Rohe, Walter Gropius, Paul Klee, and Wassily Kandinsky. The institute was founded at the same time as the Weimar Republic, right after the end of World War I, and was closed by Adolph Hitler when he came to power in 1933. After the dissolution of the institute, many of the artists and architects immigrated to the United States and created some of their most famous works.

The goals of Bauhaus were much like those of Art Nouveau; that is, to combine craftsmanship with the newest technology. However, unlike Art Nouveau, which looked back to nature for inspiration, the Bauhaus looked forward to a transformation of art, architecture, and even society along more egalitarian lines. The institute was set up much like the guild system of medieval Europe, with "masters, journeymen, and apprentices" (Ehrlich, 1991, p. 10). The emphasis was on the material and the quality of the workmanship; as a result, the work was simple and free of excess ornamentation.

Some of the most famous examples of Bauhaus style are landmarks such as the United Nations Secretariat building in New York and Mies van der Rohe's New National Gallery of Art in Berlin. However, in keeping with the Bauhaus goal of integrating art into even the simplest things, some of the products that the Bauhaus architects are most famous for include Marcel Breuer's the Wassily chair; Mies van der Rohe's the Barcelona chair; Marianne Brandt and Hin Bredendiek's steel desk light, which, though made in 1925, is still used by countless college students. The irony of the Bauhaus artists is that while their goal was to create goods and buildings for the "masses," their work really appealed to the wealthy and well educated. Today, many of their creations are still considered to be too "modern." Yet their ideas have had a profound impact on artists and architects in the 21st century.

The Bauhaus artists' emphasis on high quality, refinement, and attention to detail was a perfect complement to the vision Shiseido had for its products in the 1930s. Refer to chapter three of the *Selling Shiseido I* essay, "Marketing Beauty," for more on the influence of the Bauhaus school on Shiseido advertising.