

Artistic Movements

When considering artistic movements such as abstract expressionism or surrealism, it's common to want a clear and concise definition of what classifies an artwork as one style or the other. But it's not always that simple.



Artists, and therefore art works, don't exist in a vacuum

Artists are influenced by the work of other artists and the world in which they live and explore. While certain artworks may exemplify a particular movement in art, the boundaries can often be a little blurry, showing the multiple influences an artist experiences. In *Western Eyes: 20th Century Art Here and Now*, the works on view are all related to the movement of modernism in some way, representing a range of modernist approaches in New Mexico during the twentieth century. To help see the connections between these works, read the definitions below and try to identify one or two works that you think fall within that description. Along the way you may find that some artworks that feel like they may relate to more than one movement, and that's absolutely fine, and maybe even accurate!

A note on "modern" versus "contemporary" in art

The terms modern and contemporary are used a little differently in art compared to popular usage. For instance, someone may refer to "the wonders of modern medicine" when referring to a new treatment that just came out. In art, "modern" is used in reference to a movement commonly associated with the twentieth century. Contemporary art refers to work that has been made in recent times.

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Gustave Baumann (American, born Germany, 1881-1971)

Night Ceremony, 1948, Color woodcut

Bequest of the Victoria Babin Estate, 1999 Museum number 2006.30.2

Modernism

The dominant art movement of the twentieth century, modernism encompasses many different styles of art such as surrealism or impressionism. While many of the styles may seem very different visually, they share a number of characteristics, including experimentation with form (line, color, and shape), rejection of previous movements in art history, a focus on the materials and techniques used to create art works, and a tendency towards abstraction.



T. C. Cannon (American, Kiowa-Caddo, 1946-1978)

Washington Landscape with Peace Medal Indian, 1976, acrylic on canvas

Gift of Nancy and Richard Bloch, 2001 Museum number 2001.13.1

Indigenous Modernism

Indigenous modernism isn't, as it may sound, the work of Indigenous artists working within the boundaries of modernism. It is instead work that engages with modernity from the perspective of the Indigenous artist.

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Ángel Bracho (Mexican, 1911-2005)

Victoria! ... Destrucción Total del Fascismo

[Victory! ... Total Destruction of Fascism], 1945. Linocut on paper

Gift of the Don Pierce Estate, 2015 Museum number 2015.29.12

Mexican Modernism

Beginning in the early 1920s, Mexican modernism is recognized by its desire to reflect Mexican heritage and culture, often referencing the complex histories of the people of Mexico, their traditions, and the working class.



Russell Lee (American, 1903-1986)

Farm Family After Evening Meal, Pie Town, New Mexico, 1940, gelatin silver print

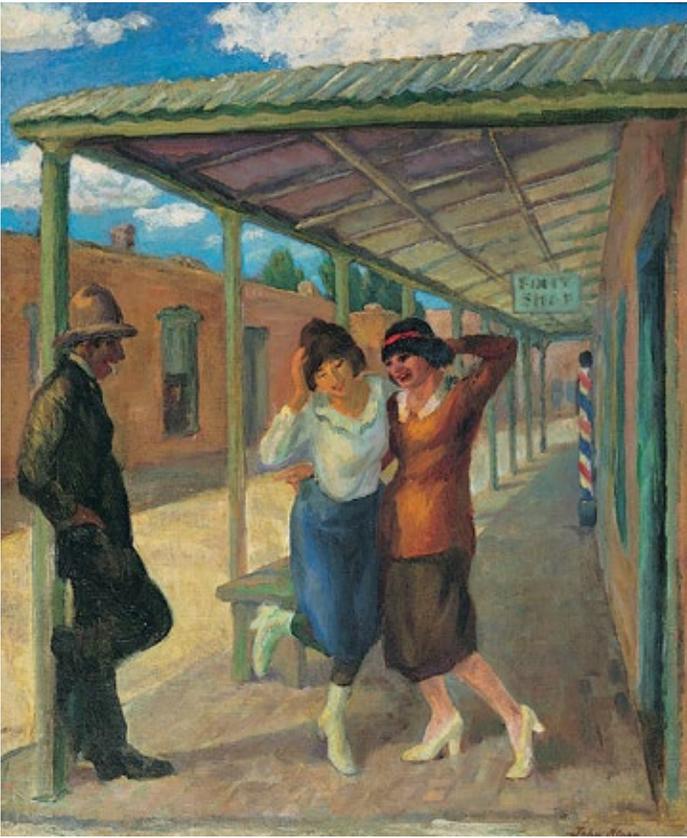
New Mexico Farm Security Administration Collection, Museum purchase with funds from the Pinewood Foundation with additional support from Barbara Erdman, 1990

Museum number 1990.70.193

Realism

As its name implies, realism describes a movement in art that favored a more accurate depiction of the world around us. Beyond how things were rendered, realism was also a shift away from the subject matter of romanticism, which featured imagery taken from mythology, the Bible, or other sources and emphasized the artist's emotional or spiritual responses to the work. Realism instead favored the daily life of different social classes in the society at the time.

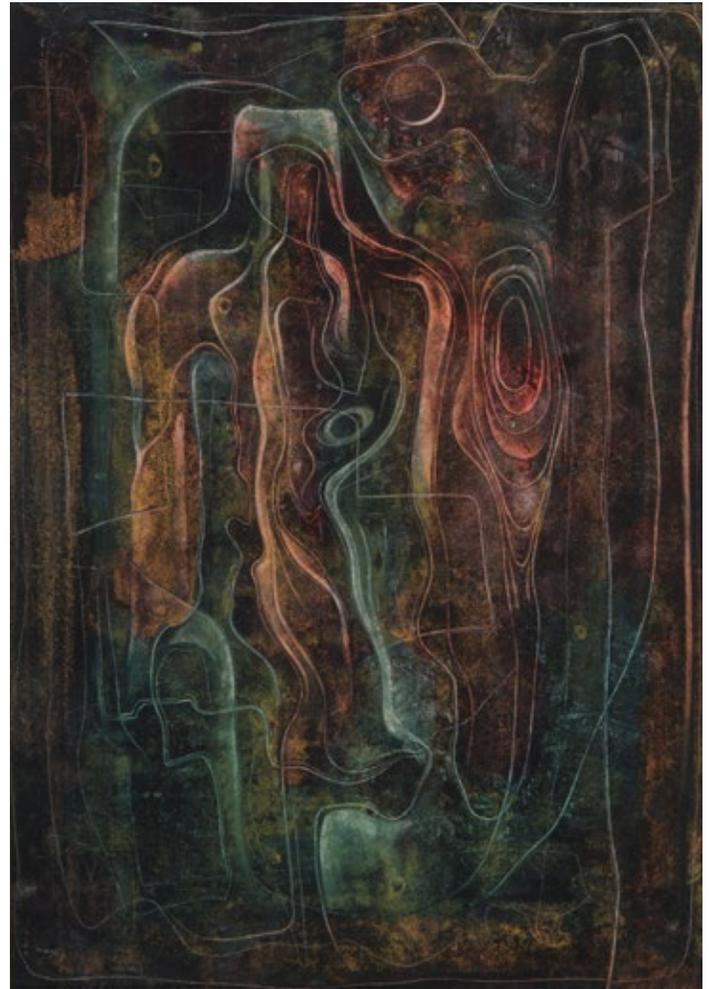
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John Sloan (American, 1871-1951)
Under the Old Portal, 1919, reworked 1945, oil on canvas
Gift of Julius Gans, 1946 Museum number 22.23P

The Ashcan School

A school of thought shared by several artists with similar views, rather than an institution that teaches classes or defined movement, the Ashcan School is often credited as being started in spirit by the painter Robert Henri. Works from the Ashcan School show a realist, gestural, almost journalistic style and often portray gritty, every-day scenes of urban life.



Cady Wells (American, 1904-1954)
Confused Memory, ca. 1945, watercolor on paper
Museum acquisition, before 1951 Museum number 100.23p

Abstract Expressionism

Rising to prominence during the 1940s and 1950s, abstract expressionism is characterized by gestural, bold marks. These works often feel spontaneous and expressive, conveying the artists' own feelings and values rather than depicting a scene from the world.

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Russell Cheney (American, 1881-1945)
New Mexico / Penitente, 1929, oil on canvas
Gift of Russell Cheney, 1942 Museum number 1181.23p

Post Impressionist

Primarily associated with the end of the nineteenth century and the beginning of the twentieth, post-impressionism includes a number of individualistic approaches with different characteristics and values. Post-impressionist work forgoes the need for a naturalistic depiction of light and color in favor more expressive, emotional, or symbolic depictions. Their use of color was often bold, vivid, and non-representational and often favored a more abstracted or geometric rendering of daily life.



Agnes Pelton (American, born Germany, 1881-1961)
Awakening, 1943, oil on canvas
Museum purchase, 2005 Museum number 2005.271

Surrealism

Surrealist art can take on many visual forms, but these works don't draw from our objective reality; rather, they look to the subconscious, imagination, and even dreams as their subject matter.

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Fritz Scholder (American, Luiseño, 1937-2005)
Super Indian (detail), 1968, oil on canvas
Gift of Fritz Scholder, 1969 Museum number 2423.23p

Pop Art

Often identified with the 1960s and 1970s, pop art is sometimes thought of as one of the first styles to signal a move away from modern art, and possibly the start of post-modernism. The name pop art refers to the style's rejection of "fine-art" of the past and an embrace of popular visual culture. The style draws on the visual language of advertisements, comic books, products packaging, and movies.



Thomas Benrimo (American, 1887-1958)
Dark Image, 1952-1953, oil on Masonite
Gift of Dr. and Mrs. R.C. Derbyshire, 1988 Museum number 1988.287.1

Non-objective

Sometimes associated with minimalist art, non-objective art is a form of abstraction that is frequently geometric in nature and bears no clear association with observed experience.