Nostalgic Art Deco exhibition offers glimpse at Depression Era

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Art Deco, a style of pervasive geometric design and decoration, was popular in the 1930's and 1939's. On display in the second floor of the McKissick Museum until May 6 are the extensive Art Deco collections of two local connoisseurs. This is a show of small objects including vases, jewelry, household items, lamps, memorabilia and the baubles of another generation.

DECO IS A current rage. Much of the style's popularity is because of its uninhibited appeal to current fads. But Deco is making comeback also because of its more sophisticated qualities. It's clean geometric line is timeless and attractive.

The McKissick display emphasizes the campy side of Deco art. All of these garish objects make up a funky, cluttered show. It's a heavy dose of nostalgia and fun, if one is interested in the period. Much can be learned from viewing the show. Anyone's eye can pick up the most common motifs: the nude nymph, the sunrise, the craze for repeated geometrics and sharp angles.

The figurine forms, of which there are many examples, are interesting for a number of reasons. The labels tell us that these pieces are from Germany, Italy and Japan. There is even a celluloid and metal figure from Czechoslovakia. Do we need better proof to realize that Deco was an international phenomenon? Since Deco began between the two World Wars, there are possibilities for political analysis that the penchant for such an organized design came in the midst of global confusion and the international sharing of art themes.

THE WORLD'S ECONOMICS at the time did affect the choice of Deco materials. The Great Depression mandated using inexpensive substances like glass. Standing in the middle of the exhibit, one becomes conscious of just how much glass was used during the period. If glass was forfeited, its substitute, lucite, was used. The early varieties of plastics were just being developed in the 1930's. The perfection of these forms would follow with World War Two technology. One of the handsome glass pieces is a pink triangular vase from 1939.

Streamlined Deco elegance is seen at its best in the angular dish set, bowls, compacts and desk sets. The most handsome pieces in the show are the 1928 chrome martini shaker, its etched glass tray and clear cut glasses. These could belong to any glassy Hollywood movie set, or in a museum of American design. Equally handsome is a streamliner dinner plate dated between 1934 and 1939. The transfer of the famous Superchief train on the plate is sleek and sharp. It is a good example of the best work of a generation who believed in trains as much as they did a President named Roosevelt.

The Century of Progress held in Chicago in 1933 was the high point of that decade. A ticket from the exposition is a masterpiece of graphic design from the Art Deco school. This is a compact display with much to look at. It's an exhibit no one should miss.

Gable—

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life. While it is true that Gable’s first fifteen years in Hollywood are more important than his last fifteen, to be complete a biography must adequately cover all periods of a subject’s life.

TO BE WELL rounded and thorough a biography about someone in the film industry must also place extensive critical emphasis on the medium he forged his reputation in. The author has made only scant reference to Gable’s sixty films. Gable’s career was acting and to understand him, we must fully comprehend that occupation. Perplexingly, Clark Gable has never garnered the popularity with college audiences that anti-heroes like Humphrey Bogart have. This may be because older people worship him calling him “The King,” and lavishing praise on him. Most students prefer his heroes to have an undergrad image.

Yet late in life, Gable scorned his King image. He said, “You know, this ‘King’ stuff is pure bullshit. I eat and sleep and go to the bathroom in my own house. There’s no special light that shines inside me and makes me a star. I’m just a lucky slob from Ohio. I happened to be in the right place at the right time and I had a lot of smart guys helping me that’s all.”

Regardless, Gable was considered the ‘King’ by almost everyone who knew him. Joan Crawford, his co-star in eight MGM movies, in the late 60’s summed up what all the biographies have tried to convey. She said, “Clark Gable was the King of an empire called Hollywood. The empire is not what once was but the King has not been dethroned—even after death.”

Piano Trio to perform

The USC Piano Trio will give a concert at 8 p.m. tomorrow in Fraser Hall. Sponsored by the USC Department of Music, the concert will feature the “Trio in G, K. 496” by Mozart and the “Trio in B, Op. 8,” by Brahms. Members of the Piano Trio are John Bauer, violin; Lucien DeGroote, cello and Charles Fugo, piano.

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