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The Wolfsonian–FIU Opens its First-Ever Major Exhibition Devoted to Art Deco in October 2018

*Deco: Luxury to Mass Market will trace Art Deco's European origins,
migration to the U.S., and spectacular culmination in 1930s Miami Beach*

*Walking tour neighborhood guide to bring the Wolfsonian experience
out of the galleries and into the streets*

MIAMI BEACH (September 19, 2018) — The Wolfsonian–Florida International University announces the museum's first large-scale exhibition devoted to Art Deco, the style so central to South Beach's world-famous architecture. On view starting October 19, 2018 and continuing for an extended run, *Deco: Luxury to Mass Market* will map the trajectory of Art Deco's influence from its first appearance in Paris to its adoption by American tastemakers and trendsetters through more than 100 works from the Wolfsonian collection.

"This is a special opportunity for The Wolfsonian to share its vast collection of Art Deco objects in a way that it has never done before," said Whitney Richardson, who co-organized the exhibition with fellow Wolfsonian curators Silvia Barisione and Shoshana Resnikoff. "There's so much curiosity about how a style introduced in Paris came to be realized so impressively, and in such a varied way, halfway around the world on Miami Beach. *Deco* tackles that very question by embracing a true Wolfsonian strength: digging into the social meaning behind a style, and considering its evolution."

Added Barisione: “The exhibition exposes visitors to the unfamiliar dimensions of Art Deco. A style that became so closely associated with France was expressed in unique ways all over the world, from India to Russia. The show speaks to how an aesthetic embraced in far-flung places could be infused with the local influences and national traditions of the designers.”

Orienting Wolfsonian visitors to the history of Art Deco, the exhibition will begin with an introduction to the style’s hallmarks and origin in 1925. The Paris fair *Exposition internationale des arts décoratifs et industriels modernes* originally brought Art Deco to public visibility under the name “art moderne” in an effort to raise the status of the applied arts and industrial design to the level of fine art. Typified by the use of ornament and stylized, natural motifs, the new taste at first emphasized luxury and borrowed greatly from a variety of historical sources such as Art Nouveau, the colonial exoticism of Mayan temples and Egyptian tombs, Cubist geometric forms, and ballet set design and costumes. It immediately proved incredibly popular, in part thanks to pioneer adopters like the influential Parisian department stores Bon Marché and Printemps creating display rooms fully decked out in the style to provide inspiration and showcase products.

The exhibition moves on to how Art Deco changed with its migration across Europe and particularly its journey across the Atlantic. Though the U.S. did not formally participate in the 1925 Paris exposition, its government delegated a commission of museum directors, department store owners, designers, and manufacturers to attend the fair and bring back ideas. Thus, many American audiences first encountered the style through museum exhibitions (at the Metropolitan Museum of Art) and in department stores (Lord & Taylor, John Wanamaker). European émigré designers trained at the Wiener Werkstätte or Deutscher Werkbund and steeped in modernist thinking likewise brought Art Deco to the U.S., where it began to take on uniquely American motifs like the skyscraper and form associations with progressive architecture and industry. The Great Depression put to bed Art Deco’s emphasis on luxury in favor of New Deal-inspired function and sleeker aesthetics. Affordability and streamlining were in vogue—trends that dovetailed with the notion of pushing a dampened economy into a promising future.

Deco concludes with the style’s pinnacle on Miami Beach as represented in hotels such as the Essex House, Kent, and New Yorker. After debuting his Florida Tropical House at the 1933 Chicago World’s Fair, architect Robert Law Weed returned to South Florida to help realize a new version of Deco design on a citywide-level, one informed by middle-class tourism and relaxation. The hundreds of Art Deco buildings that remain today, many of which have since been converted into apartments, still capture the elegance and carefree spirit of early Miami Beach—“where summer spends the winter.” Buildings selected by the curators will be featured in a unique walking guide that will complete the story of *Deco* out on the streets of South Beach, extending the show’s narrative and the style’s legacy into the now.

Key works of *Deco* include:

- Glass objects by René Lalique—a French jewelry designer who became popular for his Art Nouveau wares but found his voice at the 1925 exposition—including perfume bottles and powder boxes illustrating his influences from nature;
- A writing desk and chair designed by Kem Weber for the San Francisco residence of Mr. and Mrs. John W. Bissinger (1929), featuring his signature sage-green painted wood and bridging European and American Art Deco designs;
- A bedroom suite by Donald Deskey for Estey Manufacturing Company (1930–35) that beautifully demonstrates how even simple wooden furniture of the time could be modernized;

- Umberto Biondi's 1932 urn combining a classical form with the stylized exotic gazelle motif that was typical of Art Deco; and
- Industrial design objects by artists such as Raymond Loewy, Walter von Nessen, John Vassos, Henry Dreyfuss, and Walter Dorwin Teague.

“As an institution, we’ve been waiting to present this story,” said Wolfsonian director Tim Rodgers. “Art Deco is such a natural topic for The Wolfsonian; it shapes the architecture of our neighborhood, which attracts sightseers and admirers from across the globe every year. Though we are known for many iconic Art Deco pieces—like our lobby fountain, originally part of the façade of the Norris Theatre—our collection holds far more riches, and we’re excited to finally bring many of these out for public view.”

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Support

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About The Wolfsonian—Florida International University

The Wolfsonian—FIU is a museum, library, and research center that uses objects to illustrate the persuasive power of art and design, to explore what it means to be modern, and to tell the story of social, historical, and technological changes that have transformed our world. The collection comprises approximately 180,000 objects dating from 1850 to 1950—the height of the Industrial Revolution through the aftermath of the Second World War—in a variety of media including furniture; industrial-design objects; works in glass, ceramics, and metal; rare books; periodicals; ephemera; works on paper; paintings; textiles; and medals.

The Wolfsonian is located at 1001 Washington Avenue, Miami Beach, FL. Admission is \$12 for adults; \$8 for seniors, students, and children ages 6–18; and free for Wolfsonian members, State University System of Florida staff and students with ID, and children under 6. The museum is open Monday, Tuesday, Thursday, and Saturday, 10am–6pm; Friday, 10am–9pm; Sunday, noon–6pm; and is closed on Wednesday. Contact us at 305.531.1001 or visit us online at wolfsonian.org for further information.

The Wolfsonian receives generous and ongoing support from the John S. and James L. Knight Foundation; Miami-Dade County Department of Cultural Affairs and the Cultural Affairs Council, the Miami-Dade County Mayor and Board of County Commissioners; State of Florida, Department of State, Division of Cultural Affairs and the Florida Council on Arts and Culture; and City of Miami Beach, Cultural Affairs Program, Cultural Arts Council.

About Florida International University

Florida International University is classified by the Carnegie Foundation for the Advancement of Teaching as R1: Doctoral Universities - Highest Research Activity and recognized as a Carnegie engaged university. It is a public research university with colleges and schools that offers 196 bachelor's, master's and doctoral programs in fields such as engineering, computer science, international relations, architecture, law and medicine. As one of South Florida's anchor institutions, FIU contributes almost \$9 billion each year to the local economy. FIU is Worlds Ahead in finding solutions to the most challenging problems of our time. FIU emphasizes research as a major component of its mission. FIU has awarded more than 220,000 degrees and enrolls more than 54,000 students in two campuses and three centers including FIU Downtown on Brickell, FIU@I-75, and the Miami Beach Urban Studios. FIU's Medina Aquarius Program houses the Aquarius Reef Base, a unique underwater research facility in the Florida Keys. FIU also supports artistic and cultural engagement through its three museums: Patricia & Phillip Frost Art Museum, The Wolfsonian—FIU, and The Jewish Museum of Florida—FIU. FIU is a member of Conference USA and more than 400 student-athletes participating in 18 sports. For more information about FIU, visit fiu.edu.