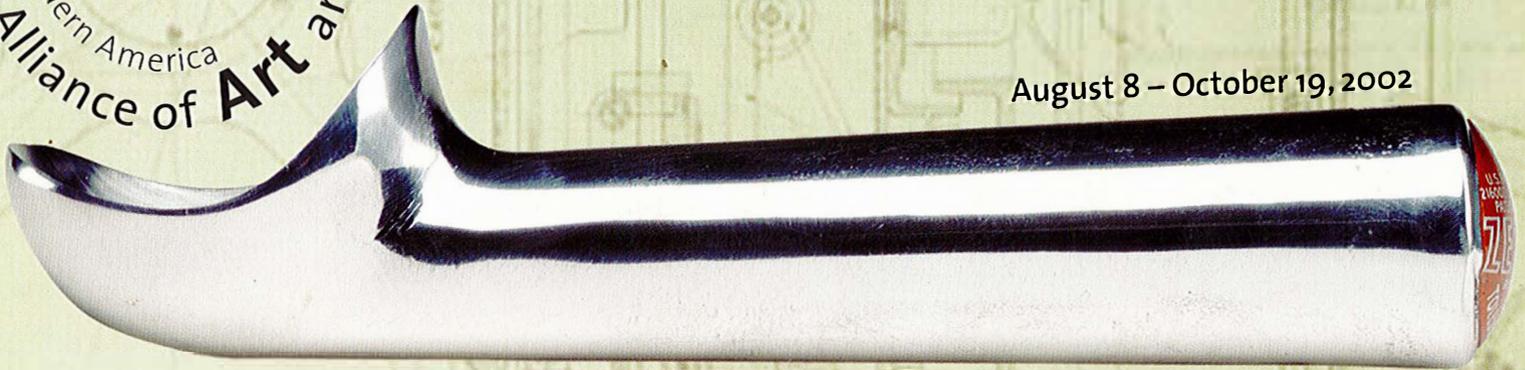




Ohio Arts Council's

**RIFFE GALLERY**

Toledo Designs for a Modern America  
**The Alliance of Art and Industry**



August 8 – October 19, 2002

Organized by the Toledo Museum of Art  
Curator Davira S. Taragin



**Until the 1920s, most American manufacturers gave little thought to the design of their products, relying instead on claims of efficiency or quality to sell them. In fact, when Secretary of Commerce Herbert Hoover was invited by the French government to exhibit examples of sound American design at a Paris exhibition in 1925, he declined, saying that America did not have any.**

As Hoover was busy declining, he did not realize that the groundwork for the widespread development of the American industrial design profession was being laid in several of the nation's cities – including Toledo. From the early part of the 20th century, Toledo industrialists, hand-in-hand with the young Toledo Museum of Art, embraced design as a way to sell products and improve people's lives. As a result, throughout much of the past century, goods designed by Toledo designers for manufacturers from Toledo and elsewhere—toys, cars, glassware, scales and atomizers—profoundly shaped America's everyday environment.

This exhibition explores the important role Toledo designers, its workforce and the Toledo Museum of Art played in the development of modern industrial design in the first half of the 20th century, and shows how the ideas and products that resulted forever changed daily life in America.

**Since mass-produced design has** played a major role in the definition and realization of the American social vision of democracy, the exploration of industrial design and the professional designer is particularly relevant as America enters a new century. In recognition of the fundamental role of design in American social history, noted author Arthur Pulos began his two-volume history of design with the following observation:

**Design is the indispensable** leavening of the American way of life. It emerged with the need for the colonists to transform the wilderness into a secure haven and expanded as a natural component of the industrial revolution in the New World. The United States was in all likelihood the first nation to be designed—to come into being as a deliberate consequence of the actions of men who recognized a problem and resolved it with the greatest benefit to the whole. America did not just happen; it was designed. History will prove that, if a humane democracy is



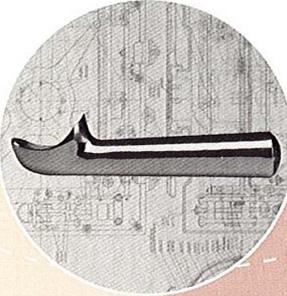
to be this country's legacy to mankind, its unique contribution to world culture may well be the democracy of its manufactured products.

**Within the past few years,** phenomena such as the success of designer Michael Graves's housewares line for the retailer Target stores have demonstrated a resurgence of interest in well-

Toledo was an ideal city to use as a case study of industrial design because its professionally designed products were primarily made for mass consumption throughout America. Products such as Jeep, Libbey's Golden Foliage tumblers, the picture window, and the Toledo "honest weight" scales have become

a part of everyday American culture. A number of Toledo's products also have received recognition from the design world in the form of awards and commendations in recognized periodicals or in respected museum exhibitions shortly after they were introduced. Finally, the question of why in the early 1930s Harold Van Doren selected Toledo to establish the first professional industrial design office in the Midwest has always intrigued scholars.

The challenge for the Toledo Museum of Art was to study the interaction of select Toledo manufacturers, designers, merchandisers, and the consumer to learn more about the alliance of art and industry. This alliance led to the development of a body of diverse products that significantly shaped American middle-class taste and lifestyle during the first half of the 20th century. *The Alliance of Art and Industry* establishes the initial phase of this research; future generations will uncover additional designs and information.



## EVERYDAY PRODUCTS



## TOLEDO DESIGNS

designed products for mass taste and consumption. It was within this climate that the idea for the exhibition *The Alliance of Art and Industry: Toledo Designs for a Modern America* was conceived.



Research for the show began with identification of those designs that had received recognition in the design world. In turn, this helped to identify those companies that, realizing the increasing importance of well-designed product to sales, had made a long-term commitment to design, resulting in its transformation from a trade activity to a strategic profession. It also unveiled previously undocumented information about the first-generation industrial design professionals who were employed by Toledo firms. An examination of their work in Toledo demonstrates that local industries offered challenges that helped the profession to evolve from the shaping of objects to strategic planning.

The city also witnessed the changes in the workplace that resulted from expanding globalization and better communications in the post-World War II period, with design evolving from a local and regional practice into an international concern.

Much of this story has until now remained undocumented. The organizers of this show relied upon countless individuals with a variety of backgrounds to reconstruct it: design historians and archivists, the families of the designers, the factory workers who took pride in their companies, and even repairmen who helped identify the designs and adjusted the machinery to function within the exhibition. Company officials frequently took time from their busy schedules to research queries.

Many of the designers whose work is in this exhibition were strongly motivated by a desire to create a utopian world. In retrospect, we can see that the alliance of art and industry that existed in Toledo, Ohio, during the first half of the 20th century brought them one step closer to realizing this dream for all Americans.

From an essay by Davira S. Taragin, excerpted by permission from *The Alliance of Art and Industry: Toledo Designs for a Modern America* (Toledo Museum of Art; Distributed by Hudson Hills Press, Inc., New York)

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The Ohio Arts Council, a state agency established in 1965, builds the state through the arts — economically, educationally and culturally — preserving the past, enhancing the present and enriching the future for all Ohioans. The Council believes the people of Ohio should share the arts. The arts arise from public, individual and organizational efforts. The OAC supports and encourages those efforts.

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People  
Mix!

This exhibition has been organized by the Toledo Museum of Art—Toledo, Ohio. Cover Image: Sherman L. Kelly, *Ice Cream Scoop*, patented 1939, The Zeroll Company.