

# DESIGN CALENDAR

## ART & DESIGN TRENDS AT THE A&D BUILDING

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By kristin

If there's one thing we took away from Friday's panel discussion at the A&D Building, *Exploring Art & Design Trends in Today's Economy*, it's this: If there's a silver lining at all to the current economic mess, it's the reminder that beautiful things are often created out of difficult times. Think back to the 1930's when modernism swept into everyday life, leaving behind what panelist and MAD curator Lowery Stokes Sims referred to as "the baggage of the Victorian period." Though the period was emotionally taxing for Americans as a whole, the Depression was actually an exciting time in the creative world, when artists produced work that served as social commentary and designers introduced new and innovative materials out of necessity (perfect example: the Eames plywood chair.) These days we're finding ourselves in a similar position, coming off the extravagance of the last 10 to 15 years when artists and designers were in a financially sound place to experiment with expensive new materials and techniques. As the country looks forward to starting over and undoing the damage of the past, it seems the creative community may also undertake a little spring cleaning of its own and embracing a new era of change and innovative prowess.

Getting back to the core of the panel discussion, Michael Cannell, writer for the *New York Times* and author of the much-discussed and prescient Op-Ed piece, "**Design Loves a Depression**," shared his views on what design trends we can expect to see in today's marketplace. Primitivism is one, playing tricks on the viewer with regards to what a piece is made of versus what it appears to be made of, which is an advantage for today's thrifty designer. Conceptual pieces are also becoming popular, which preserve and embellish the object's imperfections. Design as performance was another, which frequently raises the question of what differentiates design from art.

According to panelist Anthony Barzilay Freund, trends in the art world are in constant flux. However, as the editor-in-chief of *Art + Auction* magazine, it's his job to have his finger on the pulse of the market. He noted baroque, minimalism, materiality, German expressionism and traditional portraiture as prominent genres in art today, which was confirmed by anyone who attended **The Armory Show** this past weekend. Even more

significant is surrealism, which is gaining higher auction prices thanks in part to Damien Hirst. Even if you know nothing about art, you've probably heard of his diamond-encrusted skull that sold for a reported \$100 million. With regards to the photographic arts, he noted photo-realism and fashion photography as two rising trends that are starting to make their way into museums. However, setting the price has become somewhat of a quagmire since they are two areas that often end up in mass production.

While the panelists brought up functionality as a key differentiator between art and design, moderator Julie Lasky, Editor-in-Chief of *I.D.* magazine made an interesting point regarding materials. While the value of art is heavily subjective – pricing works based on image and notoriety sometimes rather than effort – design has always taken on a more quantifiable approach, with a direct correlation between materials and pricing. If a designer creates a series of rings with the same intriguing design, the sterling silver ring will obviously be more expensive than the acrylic ring, bringing up again the point of mass production.

In the end we learned that art, craft and design have long been intertwined in various fields. Artists may not be hands-on activists but when they produce conceptual and philosophical work that comments on society, it often inspires activism in design. While the three areas are linked, where the boundaries break down is ultimately the marketplace. Learning how to spot trends and keep ahead of the curve is a necessity to surviving in today's market.