Art for Every Home
Art for Every Home
Associated American Artists
1934–2000

Edited by
Elizabeth G. Seaton
Jane Myers
Gail Windisch

With contributions by
Ellen Paul Denker
Karen J. Herbaugh
Lara Kuykendall
Jane Myers
Bill North
Elizabeth G. Seaton
Susan Teller
Tiffany Elena Washington
Kristina Wilson
Gail Windisch

Foreword by
Linda Duke

Marianna Kistler Beach Museum of Art
Kansas State University
Manhattan, Kansas

Distributed by Yale University Press
New Haven and London
CONTENTS

FOREWORD
Linda Duke

INTRODUCTION AND ACKNOWLEDGMENTS
Elizabeth G. Seaton and Jane Myers

A CHRONOLOGY OF ASSOCIATED AMERICAN ARTISTS, 1934–2000
Gail Windisch

DELIVERING ART TO AMERICAN HOMES
Associated American Artists and the Two Men Who Shaped It, 1934–84
Gail Windisch

“GENUINE ACCEPTANCE”
Aaron Bohrod and Associated American Artists
Jane Myers

PRINTS IN THE HEARTLAND
Raymond L. Budge
Elizabeth G. Seaton

THE ASSOCIATED AMERICAN ARTISTS GALLERY SETTING
Tiffany Elena Washington

CULTURAL DEMOCRACY / CONSUMER DEMOCRACY
New Deal Printmaking and Associated American Artists, 1934–43
Elizabeth G. Seaton

GELATONES AND PAINTAGRAPHS
Associated American Artists and the Color Reproduction
Bill North

“ART OF EVERY POSSIBLE SERVICE”
Associated American Artists and Corporate Commissions During the War Decade
Elizabeth G. Seaton, Gail Windisch, and Jane Myers
JOHN STEUART CURRY’S  
OUR GOOD EARTH  
Lara Kuykendall  

ASSOCIATED AMERICAN ARTISTS AND CORPORATE PATRONAGE  
Gail Windisch and Jane Myers  

MODERN ART FOR MODERN LIVING  
Associated American Artists and Decorative Home Accessories  
Gail Windisch and Ellen Paul Denker  

“CERAMIC PIECES IN THE MODE OF OUR DAY”  
Stonelain and Decorative Taste in the American Home, 1950–54  
Kristina Wilson  

“APOLOGY AREAS,” OR HOW TO DECORATE WITH PICTURES  
Kristina Wilson  

TEXTILE ART FOR THE MASSES  
Karen J. Herbaugh  

AT ASSOCIATED AMERICAN ARTISTS WITH SYLVAN COLE JR.  
Susan Teller  

WORKS IN THE EXHIBITION  
APPENDIX I  
AAA PRINTS  
APPENDIX II  
AAA STONELAIN CERAMICS  
APPENDIX III  
AAA TEXTILE DESIGNS  
APPENDIX IV  
COMPANIES AND DESIGNERS USING AAA TEXTILE DESIGNS  
A NOTE ABOUT THE COMPANION DIGITAL PUBLICATION  
Art for Every Home: An Illustrated Index of Associated American Artists Prints, Ceramics, and Textile Designs  
BIBLIOGRAPHY  
CONTRIBUTORS  
PHOTOGRAPHY CREDITS  
INDEX
“APOLOGY AREAS,”
OR
HOW TO DECORATE
WITH PICTURES

Kristina Wilson

Although Associated American Artists was not an interior decorating business, from the early 1940s through the early 1960s it consistently used interior decorating—in the form of sketches, photographs, and didactic text in its catalogues—as a tool for selling its varied products. Reeves Lewenthal successfully placed AAA ceramics in decorating magazines such as *Better Homes & Gardens* and *House Beautiful*, and writers associated with those publications may have provided some of AAA's decorating texts. A brief examination of the interior decorating advice offered by AAA for “empty walls” reveals several notable themes.

AAA assured customers that its art would be appropriate in homes of any stylistic disposition. For example, a 1948 catalogue promoting a new line of “miniature prints” states: “Remember, whether your decor be modern or classical; French, English or Early American; you are assured that these works cannot clash with the color scheme of any room.”

A page of modest sketches from the 1954 catalogue (fig. 13.1) makes the same point: included were a neoclassical living room (top right), indicated by the pediments over the tall windows and the entablature of the fireplace mantel; a quaint early American room (bottom center) with a spindle-back settee and a wing chair; and a modernist room (bottom left) featuring built-in storage below the window seat and an admittedly awkward rendering of a leather-covered Eames chair.

The catalogues claimed that AAA's art would “unify” one's home. AAA taught its customers that “orphan wall spaces” were a problem to be avoided in interior decoration, and explained that its prints and color reproductions could help them achieve unity in a room and resolve the issue of empty walls. A 1950 catalogue indicated that the “difficult wall over a chair in the living room—those ‘orphan’ wall spaces in the bedrooms—that staircase landing... all have perhaps been begging for the ideal pictures.” It then continued, “Notice the room shown at the bottom of this page. Here the pictures have been used to unify the sofa and bookcase arrangement, composing the whole into one unified pattern.”

What might have been the significance of these words? In an era of burgeoning birth rates, when the nuclear family assumed its social dominance, an orphan was associated with not just loss but also failure to achieve an acceptable family model. Likewise, “unity” could both recall wartime esprit de corps and invoke the current ethos of the nuclear family unit living together under one roof. Indeed, “unity” is the premise of the coherent, style-based interiors discussed above, “neoclassical,” “early American,” or “modern.”

Coursing beneath this rhetoric of orphans and unity was an undeniable tone of judgment. The AAA catalogues encouraged the reader to look at her house through the unforgiving gaze of a competitive neighbor and to imagine
taking steps to defend against that scrutiny: under the headline “How to Dress Up Awkward Spots,” customers are
implored to “Look around your home, study those corners
and furniture arrangements that don’t seem to be ‘just
right.’ That chair-table-lamp unit near the window or that
open and perhaps unattractive space between the hall door
and corner. Visualize originals on those empty walls. Not
only as lovely things in themselves, but as integral parts
of a balanced, inviting arrangement.” The accompanying
small illustrations contributed to this sense of insecurity.
They tend to depict vignettes, not full rooms; a space to
look at and regard, not a space to live in. They show decor
that would pass the test, not “inviting” rooms where people
could really relax or have intimate gatherings. Readers of
a catalogue of color “masterpieces” issued around 1952
were greeted on the first page with a particularly alienating
graphic: photographs of domestic spaces branded with
scolding black X’s (fig. 13.2). The legend in the lower right
corner indicates that the X equals “Apology Areas” and then
helpfully explains: “When your guests enter a room, are
there certain blank spots (like those shown above) which
you always really feel like apologizing for—wall areas that
seem to ‘cry’ for pictures? This catalogue shows you how
inexpensively you can win compliments for tasteful use of
these areas.”

Admittedly, the company’s original interest in selling
prints explains why its catalogue illustrations emphasize
wall decor. However, it is possible that the focus on walls
was multiply determined: the walls were where a customer
hung her art, what she showed off to visitors, how she
demonstrated that she fit in. Following the interior design
advice of Associated American Artists gave her an impec-
cable house, defensible against the most critical guests.

Notes
1. The earliest example of interior
decorating advice can be found
in the 1943 annual catalogue,
while the latest is in the 1963
catalogue. My sincere thanks to
Gail Windisch for her thorough
study of the catalogues, and for
sharing her extensive knowledge
with me. This information is from
correspondence with Windisch,
July 11, 2013.

2. Authorship of the interior
decorating texts, many of which
were recycled, rephrased, and
repackaged for various cata-
louges, is currently unknown.

3. Miniature Originals, Signed
Etchings and Lithographs by
Famous American Artists (New
York: Associated American Artists,
1948).

4. An Invitation from America’s
Greatest Artists (New York:
Associated American Artists,
1950), 6–7. This same language
appeared as early as the 1943
catalogue.

5. Ibid.

6. You Can Make Your Home
Become Gloriously Alive with
These Full-Color Masterpieces
Especially Selected and
Presented by the Associated
American Artists Galleries (New
York: Associated American Artists,
ca. 1952).