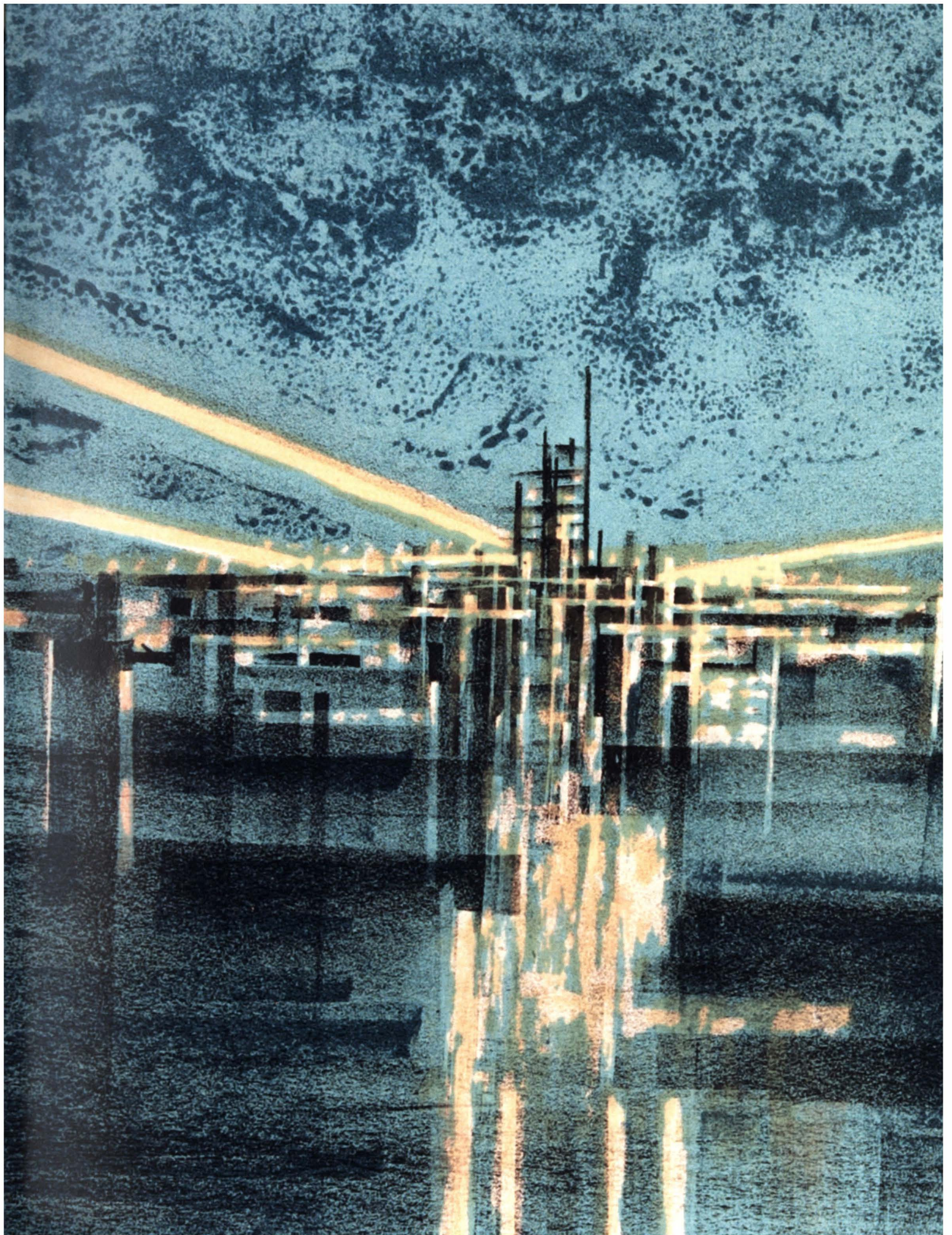


A collection of colorful buttons scattered across a white background. The buttons are in various colors, including red, green, and blue, and are arranged in a non-uniform pattern. The text "Art for Every Home" is positioned in the upper right quadrant of the image.

Art for Every Home







Art for Every Home

Associated American Artists

1934–2000

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Gail Windisch

Foreword by

Linda Duke

With contributions by

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Marianna Kistler Beach Museum of Art

Kansas State University

Manhattan, Kansas

Distributed by Yale University Press

New Haven and London



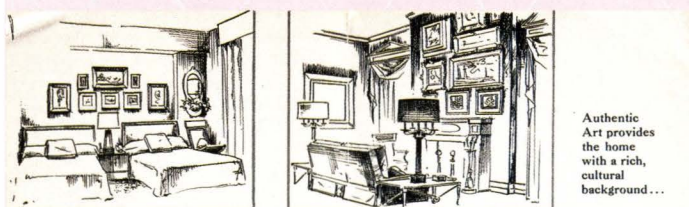
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“APOLOGY AREAS,” OR HOW TO DECORATE WITH PICTURES

Kristina Wilson



There are so many interesting ways to hang your originals and endow your home with an exciting, inviting, livable personality

ORIGINAL, authentic art in the home establishes an atmosphere of warmth, liveability, and culture. It makes the home stand for what it should be: A place where each person finds rest, spiritual satisfaction, a chance for self expression, and an atmosphere that promotes happy group living!



Fig. 13.1
Detail of illustration in *Special Twentieth Anniversary Offer . . . Etchings and Lithographs*

1954. Associated American Artists. Private collection

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.¹ 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.² 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.”³ 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.”⁴ 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.”⁵ 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.”⁶

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 impeccable house, defensible against the most critical guests.

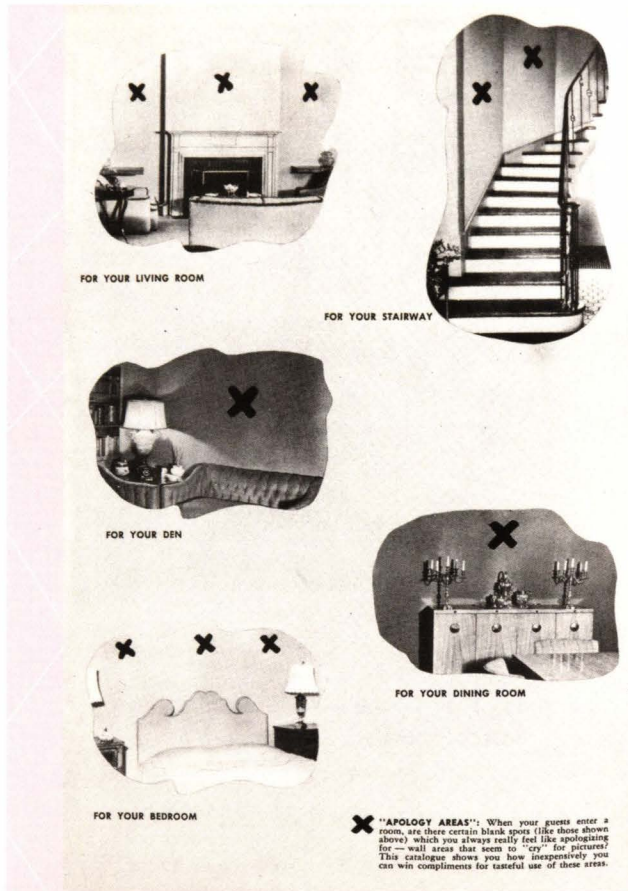


Fig. 13.2

Illustration in *You Can Make Your Home Become Gloriously Alive with These Full-Color Masterpieces Especially Selected and Presented by the Associated American Artists Galleries*

ca. 1952. Associated American Artists. KSU, Beach Museum of Art, gift of Gail Windisch, CM27.2015

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 catalogues, is currently unknown.

3. *Miniature Original, 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).