



SPiRiT OF PROGRESS

JOURNAL OF ART DECO AND MODERNISM SOCIETY INC.

issue

57

AUTUMN 2014
volume 15 number 2

PALM SPRINGS CIVIC HALL, BALLARAT MEXICO CITY KATOOMBA BALTIMORE SAN FRANCISCO



Member of ICADS
International Coalition
of Art Deco Societies

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Articles about the Art Deco era and Modernism for publication in this journal are very welcome. Our aim is to include material covering a spectrum of subjects such as architecture, restoration and renovation, landscaping, interior design, furniture, fine arts, fashion, jewellery, books, travel and transport.

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Spirit of Progress is a journal of information and opinion on all aspects of the Art Deco era and Modernism related topics. Spirit of Progress is published four times a year by Art Deco & Modernism Society Inc., PO Box 17, Camberwell Victoria 3124 Australia. The views expressed are not necessarily those of the Editor or Publisher.

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COVER

These sweeping curves are in the *Monument to the Revolution* dome in Mexico City. Turn to page 20 for Paul Martyn's article on the Art Deco delights in this huge metropolis.

AUTUMN 2014

Volume: 15
Number: 2
Issue: 57
ISSN: 1443-7554

THE ART DECO MURALS OF HILDRETH MEIÈRE

Robin Grow

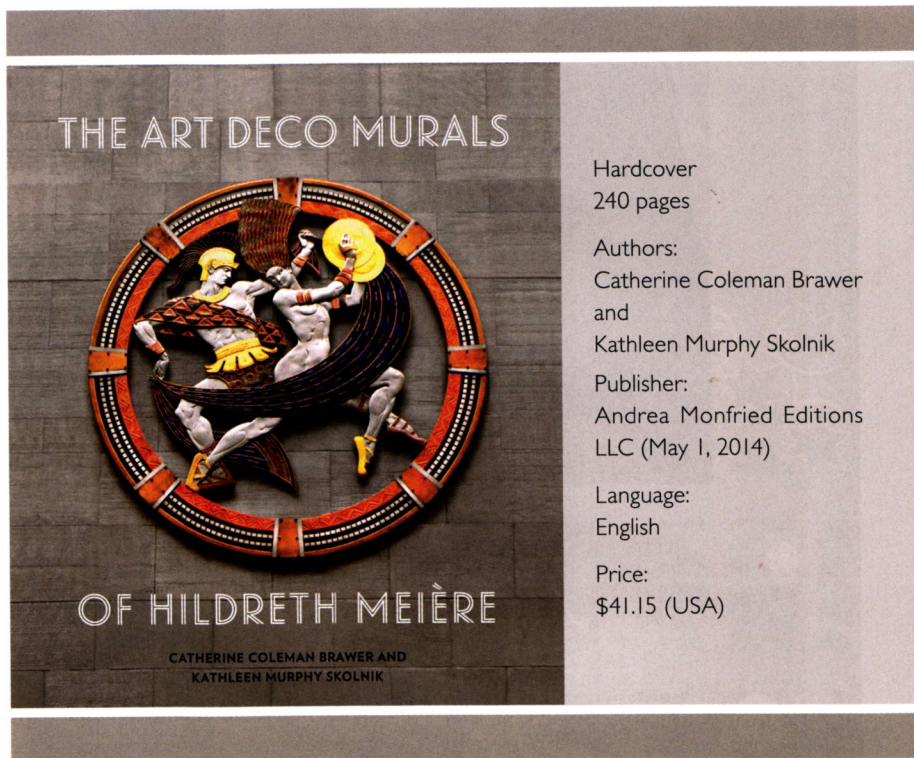
It's been nearly 10 years since the New York Congress, but many of us can still remember being dazzled by the red banking room at the Irving Trust building in Wall Street (1931), with its undulating glass mosaic walls that graduated from ox-blood red at the lower section to brilliant orange at the top. We soon learnt that it was the work of Hildreth Meièr and was one of many dazzling commissions in Art Deco style that she produced to adorn a range of buildings in American cities.

Now there is a book that documents her work and presents it in a stylish and colourful manner. Written by the eminently-qualified Catherine Coleman Brawer and Kathleen Murphy Skolnik, it presents Meièr's work in groupings such as ecclesiastical, corporate, civic, and World's Fairs, and explains where she fitted in to the American art world over her forty-year career. The book is NOT a full description of her life – in fact there is little reference to her private life and the context in which she carried out the commissions. But it is a very skilful description of the various aspects of her craft, including the place of muralists (particularly women) in the American art world.

Muralism is a collaborative process and we gain great insights into how she interacted with architects, designers, painters, sculptors, and craftsmen. For me the most rewarding part of the book was the descriptions of the complicated and difficult process of how a commission developed from a pencil drawing to a fully-installed work of art. The authors describe how commissions were obtained, the relationship with the institution or individual commissioning the work, the research into the physical setting (walls, domes, floors, interior, exterior, windows, ceilings, etc.), the decisions about materials to be used, the early iterations and negotiations before settling on a final design, and then the process of working with the various contributors to actually create and install the work (including transporting some works from Europe for installation!) This is fascinating stuff, always remembering that she was overcoming negative attitudes to female muralists, as the general opinion was that they lacked the stamina to spend long hours on ladders and scaffolds.

Many of the buildings she worked on were in the latest Art Deco style, leading her to produce creative designs as well as pioneering the use of a range of different materials, always seeking those that could express her vision. She worked with glass, ceramic tiles, metal, glazed terracotta, metal, wood; her particular speciality was mosaic tiles that combined texture, colour and permanency. And nearly always there was the use of elements from the Art Deco palette, with its use of geometric symbols and patterns, strong diagonal lines, and reinterpreted alphabets.

Of course, being a talented artist is not always a guarantee of success (at least in one's lifetime!). She realised very early



Hardcover
240 pages

Authors:
Catherine Coleman Brawer
and
Kathleen Murphy Skolnik

Publisher:
Andrea Monfried Editions
LLC (May 1, 2014)

Language:
English

Price:
\$41.15 (USA)

that she needed to develop business skills that would equip her to juggle concurrent commissions and deliver them to schedule, to develop and maintain relationships with the many parties involved in the commissions, to promote her work with the many professional bodies in the art world, and to keep her clients happy. This is one area where I would have been interested to see what support and assistance she received (or didn't!) within her personal life.

Muralists are essentially story-tellers, and there are some wonderful examples of comprehensive decorative schemes. The AT & T building in Manhattan (1932) includes a wonderful ceiling mural depicting the world being linked by telephone and wireless, with a section dedicated to Australia, predictably with sheep, wheat and a kangaroo! Her oeuvre contains many highlights including Radio City Music Hall, the Nebraska State Capitol at Lincoln (with its emphasis on the lives of the Plains Native Americans), Temple Emanu-El in NYC, and designs at the World's Fairs in Chicago (1933) and New York (1939). Thankfully most are still extant, except the World's Fair commissions.

The book is extensively researched and beautifully presented, with extensive use of contemporary and archival photographs of the art works and the buildings that housed them, together with drawings. It is also (joy of joys!) fully indexed, and contains a list of her commissions from 1915 to 1961, compiled by her daughter. It is a wonderful addition to the bookshelf of lovers of Art Deco design.